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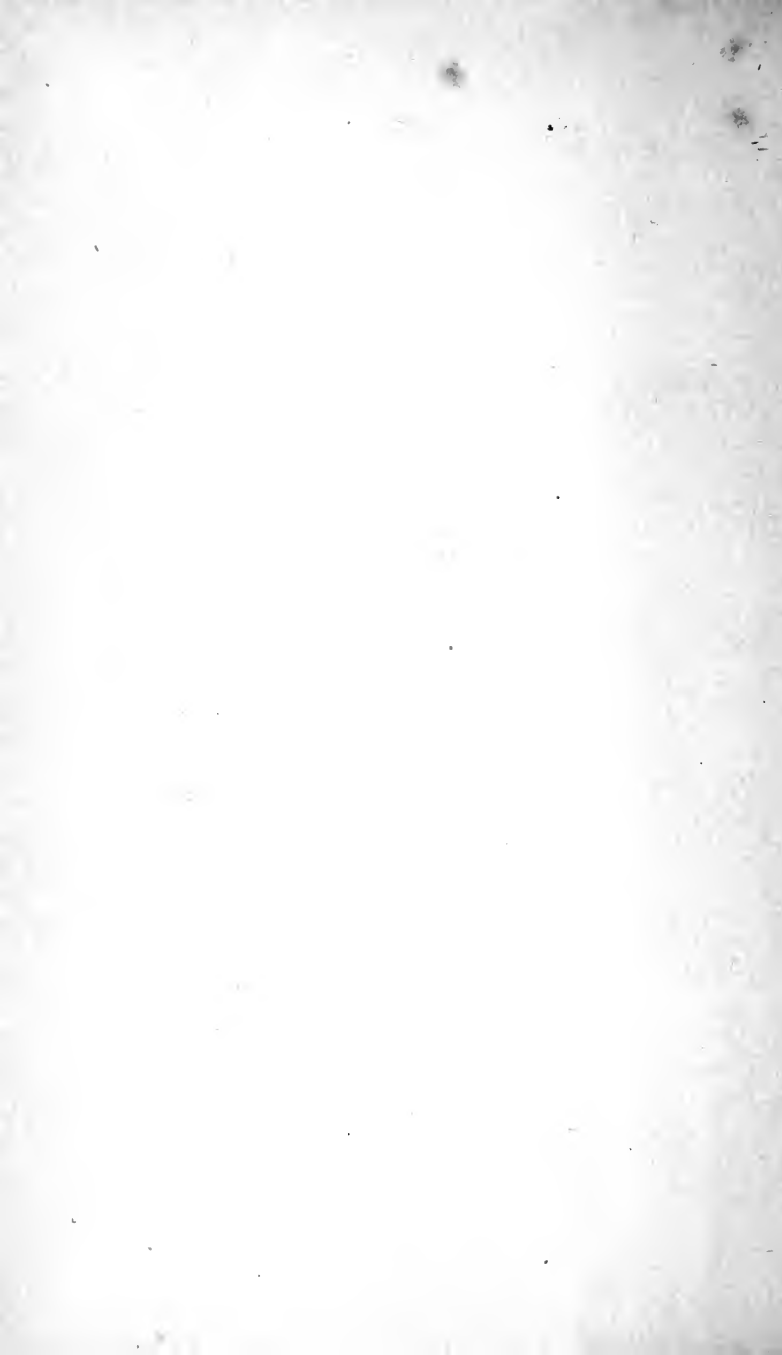
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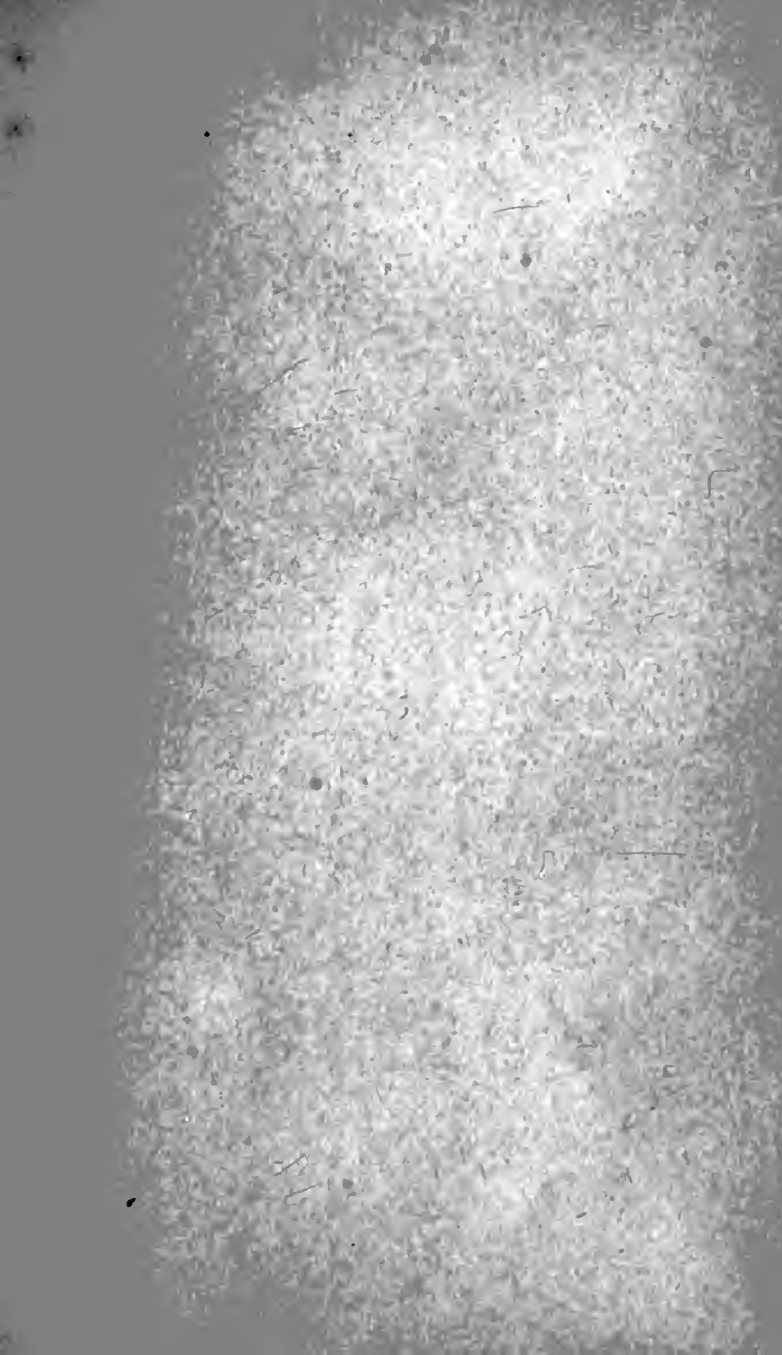
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THE OLD DOMINION.

A *Nobel.*

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

AUTHOR OF

“THE GIPSY,” “RICHELIEU” “DARNLEY,” “THE OLD
OAK CHEST,” “AGNES SOREL,” “THE WOODMAN,”
ETC., ETC.

“God’s benison go with you ; and with those
That would make good of bad, and friends of foes !”

Macbeth.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

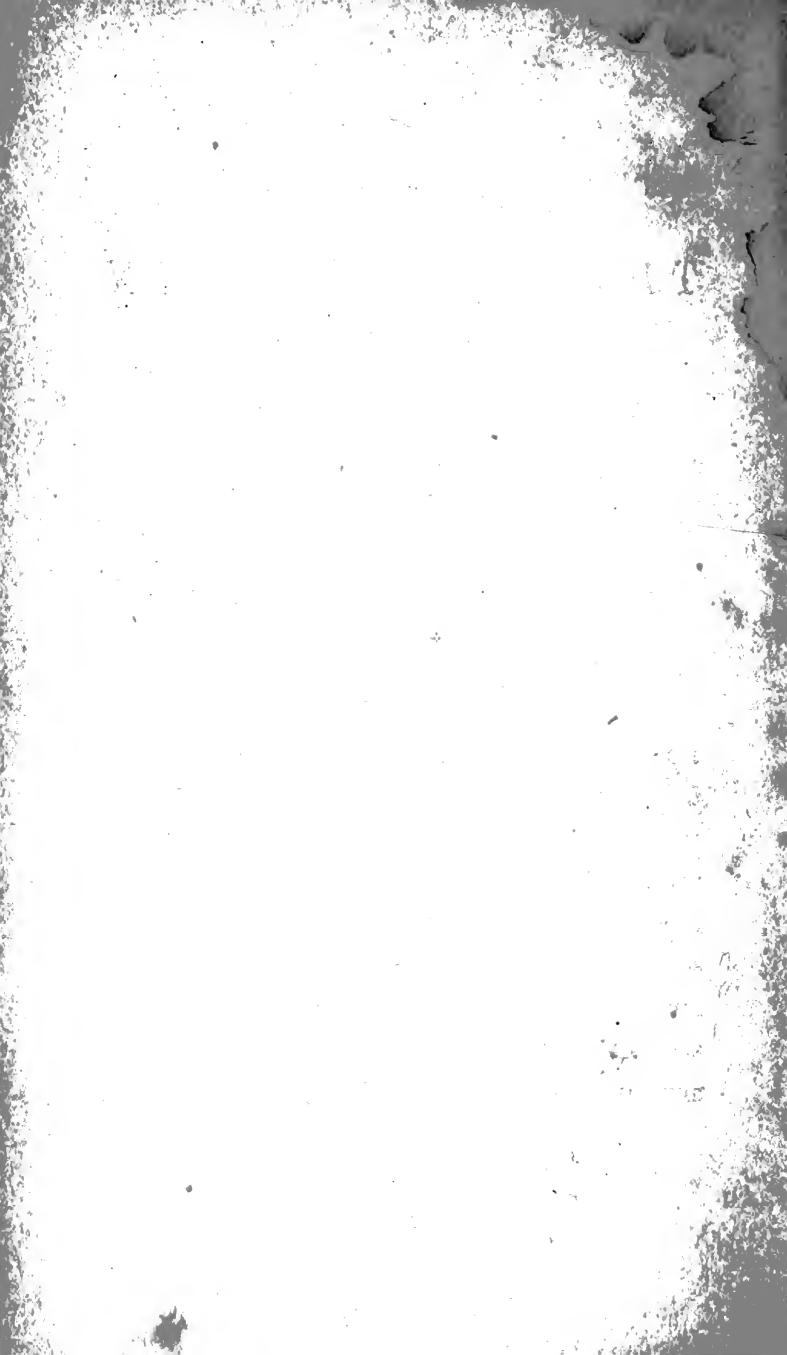
VOL. III.

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THE OLD DOMINION.

CHAPTER I.

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I KNOW no more anxious, more irritating, more painful occupation in the world than that of seeking (when we are apprehensive and doubtful of the fate of one we love,) amongst a great, confused and pre-occupied crowd, for some traces of the lost one. It has been my fate twice in life to aid in the search for a strayed child; and the agony of the father communicated itself, in part at least, to me, and gave

me the power of feeling a portion of all the torture, which imagination inflicted upon him at that moment. Every one we speak to, seems so selfish, so volatile, so obdurate, that we can hardly believe there is anything like feeling or sympathy in the human breast; when, perhaps, scanned accurately, our own sensations would be found to be selfish, and our own accusations return upon our own head. Who could tell, in that mixed crowd, what were the motives, what the feelings, what the doubt and dread, which created the sort of fierce anxiety in my heart! Who could see in my look, or detect in my voice, more than the most minute portion of that anxiety! Yet, I felt a very unreasonable degree of anger and irritation at the utter indifference of every one around me to all that was going on within my breast.

I forced my way, however, onward towards the door of the inn; but before I reached it, a fresh little party entered in the town, and cut

across my path, presenting that strange mixture of the ludicrous and the horrible, which is, perhaps, more dreadful than the purely tragic.

Doctor Blunt, the whole of the party from his house, and two or three mounted dragoons, who had joined them somewhere on the way, were bringing the prisoners, now increased to three by the presence of one of the wounded men, who had recovered sufficiently to walk into the county-capital. First came two or three horsemen; and some more armed men brought up the rear; but between the two bodies of whites, marched the poor black fellows who had been taken, very much as they had appeared when they attacked the house, except that their muskets had been cast away.

The first of the negroes, (for they marched in single file,) was the man whom I had captured myself, with a gay scarf over his

shoulders, and a handsome regimental sword by his side, which I had not thought it worth while to take away. He carried something in his hands, which I could not distinguish clearly till he came into the blaze of the torches; and then, to my disgust and horror, I saw that it was the bloody head of one of his late companions—the very head which had so strongly excited the scientific enthusiasm of the phrenologist, who had doubtless cut it off, before he quitted the scene of strife, to place the skull as a specimen in his collection.

The party halted directly opposite the inn door; and several of the officers, who were gathered together there, advanced to take a look at the prisoners. One of them seemed to recognize the man with the head, but that attracted his professional eye but little. The scarf and the sword were “matter more attractive;” and, giving a light touch to the hilt of the latter, he said—

“Why, Nelson, where did you get this?”

The negro instantly raised the swarthy head in his hands in the full torchlight, and replied—

“This here gentleman give it me last night.”

A loud burst of laughter, very horrible to hear, broke from the whole party round at the idea of the man's calling a dead negro's head, “this here gentleman;” and I must say, the captive negroes themselves, with the certainty of being hanged within a few days after, joined in the laugh as heartily as any of the rest. I could not do so; and pushing my way through the throng, I entered the inn.

The passage was crowded to suffocation; the bar, which lay on the right hand, was surrounded by a mob, two thirds of whom were drunk, and the rest hardly sober; and before I had taken ten steps through the mass, I had been invited to drink at least as many times by persons I had never seen in my life before.

I remarked that they did not seem at all pleased when their invitation was declined ; but I was in no very polite mood, even if I had been at any time inclined to get drunk for the pleasure of strangers ; and I made my way straight for the foot of a staircase, round the bottom of which the crowd was reeling to and fro, not quite so densely packed together.

Four or five steps up, supported by two strapping mulatto wenches, was a stout, well-fattened, white woman, whom I judged, by her dress, to be the mistress of the house. The moment I set my foot upon the stairs, however, she screamed at me in a tone, calculated to drown all the din below.

“ You can’t go up, sir. The whole above-stairs is occupied by ladies ; and as some of them have nought but their night-dresses on, they don’t want no company.”

“ But, my good madam,” I said ; “ I saw two or three gentlemen amongst the ladies in the balcony.”

“That’s nothing here nor there,” answered the Amazon. “Them gentlemen have brought in friends, and have a right to stay with them.”

“But I have a friend here, too,” I answered; “and I want to see her. I *will* see her, too. I think you mistake me for some of those people who have been drinking at your bar; but there you are in error. My name is Sir Richard Conway, and ——”

“Sir Richard this, or Sir Richard that!” cried the woman, “is no matter to me. You can’t go up, so that’s enough, and shouldn’t if you were Lord Dunmore.”

“I want to speak with Miss Davenport,” I replied; “to hear of her safety, and to inquire if I can serve her in any way further.”

“Miss Davenport!” cried the hostess, in a tone somewhat mollified. “Why, I didn’t know that Bessy Davenport was here—have you seen her, Imoinda? Why, I thought she was killed in Stringer’s house.”

“That she certainly was not,” I answered, hating the great, fat, coarse woman from the bottom of my heart. “She and I escaped from Mr. Stringer’s house together—I am her near relation, you know.”

“Oh, ay,” cried the woman, still screaming at the top of her voice, in order to be heard above the din. “You are her English cousin who shot Bob Thornton. But you can’t go up for all that.”

I felt the greatest possible inclination to take her by the back of the neck, and pitch her down amongst the mob below. But refraining with an ill grace, I said—

“I have every reason to believe that Miss Davenport was escorted here some short time ago, by Colonel Halliday; but I am not sure of it; and I am determined to ascertain whether she is safe or not. So now, good woman, you shall either satisfy me on that point, or I will bring the sheriff to make you.”

“Good woman !” cried the hostess, with her face all in a blaze. “You saucy coon ! Why do you call me ‘good woman ?’ My husband, the Colonel, shall ‘good woman’ you. Do you think that you English have got the dominion in the land still ? No, no ! I think we taught you better, when we whipped you all through the country. ‘Good woman,’ indeed !”

“Why, surely, you would not have me call you *bad* woman, would you ?” I retorted, a good deal irritated. “But I see, I must bring some one who will be able to persuade you better than I can.”

And descending the two or three stairs which I had mounted, I once more forced my way through the crowd in search of the sheriff.

That gentleman, however, was no longer to be seen in any of the various groups immediately in front of the house. I just caught a glance of Billy Byles as I passed out of the inn ; but he was speaking to some lady up in

the balcony above ; and I passed on without interrupting him.

From one little knot of people to another, I went ; and perhaps at any other moment, with a disembarrassed mind, the strange medley of men of wealth and men of none ; of men of education and men without ; of men of refined habits, and men of the coarsest manners ; and the perfect familiarity which existed between them all—would have given occasion for much speculation in my mind as an Englishman. But I was too much occupied with the one predominant idea to think of anything else ; and I exhausted nearly half an hour in searching for the sheriff in vain.

I was just turning back to the inn, when some one called me.

“ Sir Richard, Sir Richard,” said a voice. And, looking round, I perceived Mr. Byles coming up from the side of the market-place I had just left.

“ I have been looking for you everywhere,”

he said. "Louisa Thornton wishes to speak to you: They are all here, except Mr. Henry Thornton himself. He determined, like Doctor Blunt, to stay in his own house and stand it out, with some friends he has got there. Mrs. Thornton is frightened out of her wits, and gone to bed, but Lou said she would remain in the balcony till I brought you."

I explained to him briefly, as we walked along, the anxiety of my mind in regard to Bessy Davenport, and the obstinate refusal of the landlady to let me pass up stairs in search of her.

"Oh the old jade!" said Billy Byles, "she's a perfect Turk. They should call *her* the colonel, instead of her husband, who is as meek as Moses, poor man! She would not let me pass either, though I coaxed and bullied, and did all sorts of things. But it is about Bessy Davenport that Louisa wants to speak to you. She says she is certainly not in the inn."

My heart sank again; but I hurried on, and

soon stood under the place where Miss Thornton was leaning over the balcony.

“I wanted to tell you, Sir Richard,” said Miss Thornton, after a few words of ordinary courtesy, “that Bessy is certainly not here. Where did you leave her?”

I explained to her all that had occurred, and the reasons I had for supposing she might have been brought into the town by Colonel Halliday and his party.

“Perhaps she may be in some of the other houses,” said Miss Thornton; “for they are all full; and everybody, all over the place, seems to be searching for some one lost in the confusion of this terrible day. But I hope and trust that no harm has happened to her as you left old Jenny with her.”

While we had been speaking, a little crowd had gathered round Mr. Byles and myself; for I must remark that nobody in the United States appears to comprehend that any other person can have private business with which he has

nothing to do; and you must lock your door very tight, if you would not have others come and listen to what you have to say.

One of the gentlemen who was standing by here joined in our conversation, saying —

“Colonel Halliday, I am sorry to tell you, did not bring in Miss Davenport. I saw him just as he came in about an hour ago. He had with him two negroes, whom he had captured, and three young ladies whom he had brought from houses along the road; Miss Corwin, and the two Misses Joneses; but I know Miss Davenport was not there, for I stopped and talked to them for a minute.”

Here at once was knocked away every frail prop and support on which I had built my hopes and expectations. Hope was indeed not destroyed; for Hope is immortal, reaching to the grave and beyond the grave. Yet there was no resting-place for her footsteps; a light, pale and faint though not extinguished, flitted, wandering like an *ignis fatuus*, over a wild,

an insecure ground, where there was no path to guide, no solid basis to support. Where was she? What had become of her? Who could tell? The glimmering light rested principally upon one point alone. No corpse had been found in the wood; no trace of the sanguinary acts which had left terrible witnesses behind them wherever they had been perpetrated. But a faint hope, though not so full of temporary distress, is, perhaps, more agitating, more engrossing than a painful certainty.

Billy Byles and the gentleman who had just spoken, continued to converse for some minutes, without my hearing or attending to anything that passed between them. I believe that Louisa Thornton spoke to me from the balcony above; but I fear I did not answer her. Standing with my eyes fixed on the ground, and my thoughts bitterly pre-occupied, I saw, I heard nothing, and it was not till Mr. Byles touched my arm, saying—"That is a good thought;

let us try it," that I woke from this dreadful reverie.

"What is?" I asked; "I did not hear."

"Why," answered Billy Byles, "Captain Wilson proposes we should go down to the old block-house, erected in revolutionary times to defend the river, and where the prisoners are confined, and examine them as to what became of Miss Bessy. Those we took at Doctor Blunt's must be the same who passed over the ground where you left her; and the devils will tell at the first question; for they have all got a looseness of tongue which prevents them from having any concealments. That is the difference between an Irishman and a Negro: the one, pretending to tell all, tells nothing, for fear he should hurt himself or his hundred-and-fiftieth cousin: the other, tells everything, without caring whether he implicates his own life or that of a dozen more:"

"Let us go," I cried, seizing upon the suggestion eagerly; for I was a drowning man,

and a straw seemed some support. "Which is the way to this place?"

Billy Byles bade Miss Thornton adieu in tones which implied that his suit had prospered; and then led me across the market-place towards the banks of the little river which flowed past the town. Here we came to a small stockaded house, which had served in former times to defend the stream, and before which two sentinels, with muskets on their shoulders, were sedately walking. Only another person was visible, who, though he attracted but little of my attention, seemed considerably to excite that of Billy Byles."

"Hang me," he said, if I do not believe that is Colonel M——. What can he be doing there, down by the side of the river with a spade in his hand? Why he has got a basket there too.

"Never mind," I answered; "we have something more important to think of." And advancing towards the block-house, not with-

out turning his head several times, he demanded admission, which was immediately granted. We had no light but the moon; and the black faces of the hand-cuffed prisoners were not very easily distinguished, the one from the other.

“Which is Nelson?” demanded Billy Byles.

“I’se he,” answered one of the men advancing.

“Well now, Nel,” said my companion, “we have got a question or two to ask you; and what you say, if you tell us the truth, shall not be used against you, but rather in your favour. But if you tell us lies, hang me if I don’t cut your throat with my own hands.”

“I tell de truth, Master Byles, be you sure of dat,” answered the man in a bold tone. “Everybody knows what I have done, and here I am; no use of telling lies now.”

“Well, then, tell us exactly,” answered

Billy Byles, "all that happened after five o'clock this evening, till the time when you marched upon Doctor Blunt's house."

I cannot follow the negro's jargon through the long account he gave of the events of those few hours. The substance was as follows:—The party of Nat Turner, after having advanced towards Jerusalem, and having been met by a severe fire from a party of white men on the road, retreated in good order through the by-paths of the wood, known to few but themselves. When they came to the meeting of the two paths I have mentioned, they found they had been outflanked by a party of horse in pursuit. They saw well enough, he said, a smoke rising up in the wood, though they could not tell whether the fire had been lighted by their own people or by an enemy. Knowing, however, that smoke would attract the attention of the white men, they determined to leave it on their left, and to take shelter amongst the bushes in the thicker part of the

wood, being certain that they could not outstrip their pursuers before they came to the open ground. Signals were agreed upon ; Nat Turner, who, according to his account, was perfectly calm and confident, laid himself down at the foot of the tree where I had found him, and the rest concealed themselves in the thick bushes. There they lay till after I came up. Nelson stoutly denied having seen any woman in the whole course of their retreat. Nothing could make him swerve from this assertion. When remembering the two tracks I had seen, the one to the right, the other to the left, at the thick laurel brake, I asked if his party had not divided into two. This he denied, stating that they had pursued one undeviating course, and had merely scattered themselves round their leader, when they found a sure place of concealment.

At length, I put the questions to him straightforwardly, whether he knew Miss

Bessy Davenport? whether he had seen her during the preceding day?

He answered he had known her ever since she was a child, and positively asserted that they had seen nothing of her.

“We hunted for her at Mr. Stringer’s,” he said; “for we had heard that she was there; and Will wanted to kill her, though Nat did not. But we could not find her, and we never saw her at all.”

After the pause of a moment or two, during which I and my companion remained silent, the man looked up in my face, saying—

“I dare say, if you want to find her, master, some of old Miss Bab’s servants can help you. Depend upon it, they know all about it.”

Here was both a renewal of hope, and some clue to guide me. But the light was faint, and the clue somewhat frail.

CHAPTER II.

I HAVE hitherto adhered as strictly to what I did and saw myself, as if I were in a court of justice, and bound by the law of evidence. But you, who are at a distance, may, perhaps, require some farther explanation, to enable you to comprehend clearly the state of things around me. I think Rumour ought to be represented, not only with a hundred tongues, but with a great magnifying glass in her hand; and she did not fail to use it on the present occasion, although I have certainly

seen events of less importance much more magnified before they got very far from the scene in which they were acted. Indeed, the principal excitement and exaggeration were in the neighbourhood of the spot itself, where the insurrection had taken place. Here everything was in confusion, if not amongst the military, amongst the inhabitants. No one seemed to know the number of the insurgents; whether there was one man or many; what direction they were taking, and whether there were ramifications of the conspiracy in other counties and states. Consequently, Jerusalem and the whole neighbourhood was in a state of the greatest alarm; and very dark and gloomy apprehensions were entertained, even by the best informed, and the calmest of the county authorities. Every one felt as if he were standing close to a powder-magazine in which a slow match was burning; and, I have no doubt, that if the revolted negroes had gained any success, a considerable number more of the

slaves would have risen, and a very formidable body of armed men would have been collected, although I by no means imagine that anything like a general revolt would have taken place. Indeed, the conduct of many of the negroes on this occasion showed the strongest attachment to their masters, and a firm determination to resist all temptations to join the insurgents.

Throughout the whole country round, however, a feeling of alarm and uncertainty spread far and wide. But vigorous measures were immediately taken to crush the insurrection in the spot where it had originated, and to guard against its spreading farther. Bodies of troops and marines were instantly sent up from Norfolk and Fort-Monroe. Detachments of volunteers and militia were despatched from Petersburg and Richmond, and abundance of arms and ammunition was collected and forwarded with all possible haste.

The public journals again and again warned their readers against exaggerated reports, and

unnecessary alarm ; but they aided a good deal to increase apprehension, by such reports as these—

“That the insurgent negroes numbered about four or five hundred. That although repulsed in one or two skirmishes with the militia, they were retreating towards Colonel Allen’s plantation, where they were likely to be greatly reinforced.”

Other reports said that they were falling back on the great Dismal Swamp, known to be the place of refuge already of a great number of fugitive slaves. And again, that they were all well armed, mounted, and supplied with ammunition.

The statements of the number of white persons who had been slain, and the number who were missing, was also very much exaggerated, and carried into many bosoms, the same anxiety and terror, which agitated mine.

Although the account, given by the prisoners, at the block-house, certainly afforded some

relief to my mind, and re-awakened hope, I could not shake off apprehension ; and I would fain have set off that very hour to ascertain whether poor Bessy had really found a refuge amongst the old servants of aunt Bab. I found that was impossible, however ; and, after having met all my suggestions, by objections unanswerable, Billy Byles added—

“ Depend upon it, Sir Richard, there is nothing to be done by you to-night, but to get some food and some rest. With the first ray of light to-morrow morning, I will be ready to set out with you ; and, to-night, you shall share a little dog-hole of a room which I have secured for myself in the midst of all this scramble and confusion. As to food, that will be a more difficult matter ; for I do not believe there are provisions enough in Jerusalem to feed one half of the people here. Plenty of good whiskey is to be got, and bad brandy ; but everything else, as far as I can learn, is exhausted. Come, first, let us go and see what

our good friend, the Colonel, is doing down there. I can't imagine what he can be about, poking away at the corner of the bridge by himself."

Billy Byles was one of those men who were made for happiness; whose minds may perhaps be susceptible of strong impressions; but those impressions are merely temporary. Now I have heard it argued that men of this character suffer as much diminution of their pleasures as their pains. But I do not think so. In the first place, few will assert, I imagine, that in this world of trial, the pleasures are at all equal to the pains; and, in the next place, I do not see that it is a necessary consequence of men being little susceptible of a pang, that they should be little susceptible of an enjoyment. At least, at that moment, I envied him the facility, with which he could cast away the thought of all the dreadful things which had been passing around us; and walk unconcernedly down to the river-side to

see what a gentleman had been doing, in whom he had no particular interest.

The distance could not be above twenty or thirty yards. I remained where I was; but the moment after, he called out—

“Hurrah! Treasure trove, treasure trove! Gentlemen both, I seize and impound you on behalf of the state, and of William Byles, Esq., of Dunmore, near the Cross Keys, and the county of Southampton, in the State of Virginia.”

And up he came, carrying in each hand a large, short-necked, black bottle.

“What have you got there?” I asked.

“London porter, for a hundred dollars,” answered Billy. “That fellow knows what good living is. Oh, he’s as cute as a sea-gull, and I see how he has set to work. He has somehow got up some London porter; and, finding victuals and drink rather scarce in this great city, and good friends plenty, who would help him through it, he has gone and hid it

down there in the corner under the sand, to come down and drink his own health when nobody is by. There are more bottles there. You had better go and get a bottle. London porter is meat and drink too."

I declined, however, helping myself from another man's store, without his permission; but, Billy Byles only laughed at my scruples; and we returned into the heart of the village. There he introduced me into what he called his dog-hole, which was a neat little room enough, in a neat little house, belonging to a free mulatto, and his wife—quadroons, I suppose I ought to call them; for the portion of dark blood seemed to be very small. They were all attention, and even affection towards Mr. Byles, who informed me that they had been slaves of his father, but were made free at his death. The old man hurried to get a couple of glasses as soon as Billy exhibited the porter-bottles; and, while he was gone, my companion fell into an unwonted reverie, which

was explained as soon as his coloured friend returned.

“Jacobus,” he said, “there’s something I want you to do for me, and you must do it cleverly—here, cut this wire over the cork—You know Miss Davenport, don’t you, Miss Bessy Davenport?—there, take that fork, thrust it through the wire and twist it round—Well, she escaped from Mr. Stringer’s house, with this gentleman, my friend, Sir Richard Conway; but somehow she got lost in the woods, about six or seven o’clock this evening. Now, I want you—cut the string, there’s a knife—now, I want you to go out and inquire everywhere, and of everybody—d——n it, you’ll let all the porter jump out of the bottle. Pour it out quick into the two glasses. Sir Richard, your health.—You see, Jacobus, we must and will find out, this very night, what has become of Miss Davenport; and you know quite well that every piece of news throughout the whole country gets tossed about from hand to hand, amongst your people, just

like a ball amongst a pack of children. So, you must go and find out if there's anybody in the whole place who can tell you where she is. Ask the people as if it were a great secret; promise them to tell nobody, and then come and tell us."

"I'll do my best, Master Billy," said the old man; "but you know there's been such confusion these last two days, that we are all straggled, and nobody has had any time to find out anything. You say she was lost about six or seven this evening?"

Mr. Byles added all the information that was necessary, and his envoy departed, somewhat proud, I imagine, of his commission.

"He won't find out anything to-night," said Billy Byles, as soon as the man was gone; "for, most probably, nobody in the place knows anything about the matter. But he'll go and talk to all the coloured people, and then they'll all begin jabbering, and chattering, and inquiring. The question will go, heaven knows how

down all the high-roads and by-ways; and to-morrow, we shall have a whole budget of intelligence. Halloo! that sounds like cannon coming in."

And, going to the window, he added—

"So it is, by Jove! Two brass pieces, and a squad of artillery-men. We'll pound them to-morrow, if they take the field. Let us come and see what is going on."

I accompanied him to the door; but we had scarcely reached the threshold, when we were met by Mr. Henry Thornton; his fine, tall figure, looking very imposing in the garb of a colonel of militia. He shook me warmly by the hand; but I could see that a good deal of grave anxiety was upon his countenance.

"I did not think of coming into town, to-night," he said; "but I heard of your fight at Doctor Blunt's, and that the poor devils had been dispersed with great loss. One serious check is enough to discourage them altogether.

I think we shall have no more of it; and at all events, it is over for to-night. But what is this I hear about poor Bessy Davenport?"

I related to him everything that had occurred, and watched his countenance eagerly as I did so, in order to divine, if possible, what were the conclusions at which his mind arrived.

He looked very grave, especially when he found we had ascertained that Bessy had not been brought in by Colonel Halliday's party.

"Not that he is the man," said Mr. Thornton, after expressing some painful disappointment at the breaking down of that hope of her safety; "not that he is a man whom any of us would choose to act as her escort under ordinary circumstances. But he dare not—no, he dare not," added Mr. Thornton, somewhat sternly, "take any advantage of his position."

"Who is this Colonel Halliday?" I asked. "You all seem to have some doubt of him."

"Why, don't you know?" cried Billy Byles.

“He was Bob Thornton’s second in the duel with you.”

“He acted in a very gentlemanly manner there,” I said.

“Ay, that might be,” answered Mr. Thornton. “But he’s a wild, unscrupulous fellow, notwithstanding. He certainly was colleagueing with Robert Thornton, when that worthy tried to cheat her out of her whole property. Perhaps you do not know that he proposed to marry her, when she was not sixteen, and we had afterwards every reason to believe that there was an understanding between him and Robert, that they should share the spoils between them.

“Bessy, however, settled the matter for herself; for she told him, she would sooner marry a rattle-snake; and I do not think he has ever forgiven the disgust—ay, the disgust—that is the only word, which she expressed towards him. She was quite a girl then, and a wild girl, too; and she spoke her mind more

freely, perhaps, than she would have done, had she been older. There is no use of making enemies in this world, even of people we do not desire for friends."

Mr. Thornton fell into a somewhat dark and gloomy reverie; and it may easily be imagined that my thoughts were not particularly pleasant.

After a moment or two, however, he said—

"Well, Sir Richard, it is now near one o'clock. You had better go to bed, and try to rest. I will do the same. We will both be up early to-morrow; and, after having taken counsel with our pillows, we may be able to devise some plan for tracing poor Bessy out."

He was turning away, when suddenly he held out his hand to me in his frank, kindly way, saying—

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear sir. I have no doubt our dear girl is safe. If she had met with any harm from these misguided

people, her body would have been left where they murdered her. They have taken no pains to conceal their deeds. All I want to get rid of is this horrible feeling of uncertainty; though, indeed, we are in the same case with a hundred others in this town; for there is hardly a family that is not doubtful and anxious about some one of its members. I am not one to use the name of God on every occasion; but trust in Him, is, in such circumstances, our best stay and only consolation."

Thus saying, he left me; and his last words recalled to my mind the better and the surer sources of hope and comfort, which had been too much forgotten in the excitement and anxiety of the last few hours.

A mattress and a blanket were brought in for me, to Mr. Byles's room; and though he, in his universal good humour, would fain have had me take his bed, I cast myself down upon my lowly couch, and resolutely tried to sleep. I had by no means recovered my full strength;

I was weary and exhausted with the labours of the day and with want of food. Perhaps in such a state of fatigue, the glass of porter which I had taken had more effect than it otherwise would have produced ; and though I was half angry with myself when I felt the leaden weight pressing down my eyelids, I was soon in a profound sleep. I do not believe if an axe had been suspended over my head, or a pistol presented at my ear, I could have kept myself awake.

CHAPTER III.

THOUGH my sleep was dead, heavy, and dreamless, it lasted not long. I awoke with a sudden start and a sense of terrible apprehension. I am certain, indeed, that even when no visions perpetuate vaguely, during slumber, the thoughts which have occupied us waking, the sensations of the heart—if I may make such a distinction between heart and mind—persist, while all the ordinary faculties are steeped in oblivion, and knock at the doors of the brain till they awake us.

I struck my repeater, and found it a quarter past three ; and although I knew that in this latitude an hour or two of darkness had to intervene before the first dawn of day, I could find no more refuge in sleep. I lay there, and revolved the circumstances in which I was placed, and, as I imagined, all the probabilities—nay even the possibilities of the case.

But I made no progress towards any conclusion. The prospect was as dark and dreary as ever ! perhaps more so. At least, it seemed so to me ; for I know no more unpleasant hour to wake at with feelings of apprehension on the mind than three o'clock in the morning. It seems as if all the grizzly phantoms of imagination and dread gather thickly round our bed ; and the dark sensation of that gloomy Nemesis, which hangs for ever brooding over human happiness, is felt more powerfully than at any other time.

I struggled hard against it. I tried to put my trust in God. But there are moments when

Faith and Hope seem darkened; when God's inspiring grace seems withdrawn; when the power of the prince of the air seems mighty over us in the darkness, and every image that can shake our trust is presented with appalling force.

"How many," I thought, "had the very night before risen from their knees to lay themselves down to rest with hope and faith in Him in whom I now strove to put my trust, and had never risen but to receive the death-blow of the murderer, or to weep over the ruin of every edifice of love. Oh, man! man! here lies our fault. Our hopes, our wishes, our faith, our trust, go not beyond this world. The dark chasm of the grave stops human thought and human feeling in their course, and we neither fully trust nor believe beyond.

Such, at least, was the case with myself at that time. And the next hour-and-a-half that passed, till the grey glimmer of the dawn

began to appear, were amongst the most melancholy, I ever endured in my life. Oh, Bessy! if you could have seen my heart then, you would have known more than words could ever convey.

Before the sun was fully risen, Mr. Byles and I had quite a little levee around the door of our room. The first who appeared was Zed, who had found out where I had housed myself; and, coming with the first rays of dawn, had roused our worthy host and hostess from their short slumber. The second was good Mr. Jacobus himself, who reported that he had been able to learn very little, notwithstanding his utmost endeavours. All, in short, he had obtained was a vague rumour that Miss Davenport had been seen somewhere with old Jenny, Aunt Bab's cook; and that she would most probably be found with the other servants of the family at the sheriff's plantation, about seven or eight miles off. Next to him, came

Mr. Thornton, who had conducted his inquiries better, and had more reasonable suggestions to make than any of us.

He cleared the room of the other two visitors; and then, seating himself in the only vacant corner, said—

“I have been making inquiries this morning whether Halliday returned to the town last night. I find he has not been here since eight or nine o'clock; and I cannot discover where he has gone. This strikes me as somewhat strange; and I should propose, that as soon as they are awake and up, to enquire of the three young ladies whom he brought in, if they saw anything of Bessy and her companion. I dare say we shall be able to get speech of them presently; for people's minds have been too much agitated for much sleep to have hung over Jerusalem last night.”

“In the meantime, however,” I said, “I will ride over to the sheriff's quarters, and

inquire if anything has been heard of the dear girl there."

"You had better wait till these young ladies have risen," rejoined Mr. Thornton. "They cannot be very long, I think; and they might give us information which would lead us in a totally different direction."

I was too impatient to wait; and Billy Byles seconded me.

"Oh they will sleep better now the daylight's come in," he said. "You won't have them up for these three hours; and by that time Sir Richard and I will be back again."

A difficulty, however, occurred to me which I had not thought of before. I had no horses but those I had borrowed of Doctor Blunt for the purpose of riding into Jerusalem; and I did not think myself altogether justified in taking them any farther. The objection however was easily met by Billy Byles, who exclaimed—

“ Oh, there are lots of horses here, belonging to every body and nobody. Come away over to the inn-stable, and you’ll soon be able to provide yourself with a steed.”

I succeeded in doing so, sooner than even he expected; for, on entering the stable in the third stall to the left, what should I see, but my own horse, which I had bought in Norfolk; and a little farther on, that on which I had mounted Zed.

Of course, I had no hesitation in taking possession of my own property; though the ostler was inclined to make some opposition. But the word of Billy Byles was omnipotent with all who had to do with horse-flesh in that part of Virginia. And he declared he could swear to my horses amongst ten thousand.

The ostler fairly owned that he did not know who had brought the beasts in; and the only farther question was about saddles and bridles.

“Oh, take any one, take any one,” said the ostler, with a grin. “We have been in such a state of confusion that nobody knows whether the saddle is on the right horse or not.”

“Here’s yem, master, here’s yem,” cried Zed who had followed us into the stable. “But where mine is, Lord help us, I cannot tell. So I had better take the best I can find.”

These matters being at length arranged, we looked to the charging of our arms, and prepared to set out; but Zed approached my horse’s side, asking, what he was to do with Doctor Blunt’s horses.

“Would you be afraid to take them back to Doctor Blunt’s alone, Zed?” I asked.

“Oh dear, no, massa,” he answered; “nobody hurt old Zed; and, besides, I think them fellers is had enough of it.”

I accordingly gave him money to pay for

the animals' food, with orders to take them back to their master's house at once.

Billy Byles and I set off at a rapid pace; but I could easily discover that my horse, although he had hardly been worked at all for the last two months, had been so hard-ridden during the preceding four-and-twenty hours, as to abate his strength and spirit considerably. Indeed, I afterwards found that he had been stolen by the insurgents from Mr. Stringer's house on the night of the massacre, and had been used incessantly, without food, till the man who rode him was captured by a party of the militia.

It was thus nearly an hour, before we reached the lane which led down to the sheriff's plantation, upon, or near which, we were told, aunt Bab's old servants were now quartered. We had not been able to find that tall and worthy functionary before we set out; and, consequently, we were without any specific information as to where the poor negroes

were to be found. We rode direct towards the house, however; and, as we approached, saw a worthy gentleman—who might perhaps have some shade of colour in his blood, though very slight—quietly mounting a stout horse of that round, compact form which generally betokens great powers of endurance.

“Here’s the overseer,” said Billy Byles. “We’ll ask him where we can find the poor people.”

He accordingly rode up, and put his questions; and the good overseer, bowing civilly, said—

“I will show you, gentleman. They are at what we call the old quarters, two miles off, just upon the edge of the Swamp. Mr.— thought it would be better to place them there, as the cabins are comfortable and were vacant; and no one could get at them to steal them without crossing the plantation. I have put them,” he added, “to a little task-work, just to give them something to do. But a regular

account is kept of what they earn, which will be given in, when the courts decide to whom they belong."

He looked at me, as he spoke, as if understanding fully that I was one of the claimants; and I thought I recognized his face as one of those who had been with the party who pursued the kidnappers of these poor people as far almost as the frontier of North Carolina.

"I suppose the negroes are very well content," I replied, "to remain here, and not go to New-Orleans."

"That they are," answered the man; "and very much obliged to you sir, for stopping them just when you did. I believe one half of them would have died, if they had taken them away. They were born here and bred here, and have all been very happy here; and you'll find very few that like to quit Virginia, go where they may."

I could not but smile at the man's patrio-

tism ; though, to say the truth, I did not much doubt he was right ; for, as far as I had ever seen then, and have ever seen since, the existence of slavery—great as the evil is in every form—is so mitigated in that state, that I doubt not the slaves themselves would “rather bear the ills they have, than fly to others that they know not of.”

“Pray,” I asked, as we rode on, “when speaking of task-work, what do you consider as a fair day’s task here?”

“That depends upon the nature of the work, sir,” he answered. “But I can show you, as we go along, what we should consider a fair day’s task in several different kinds of field labour.”

He did so ; and I found that it was rather less than one half of what an English labourer could perform easily in a day.

“Do you mean to say,” I inquired, “that one of your hands cannot get through more than that in a day?”

“Oh dear, no sir,” he replied. “They can do twice as much in ordinary weather. Sometimes, it is dreadful hot to be sure; and then they can’t do as much; but generally they have a good many hours to do what they like about their own place, if they are industrious—if not, to lie still and sleep as some of them do. Task-work, I think, is the best plan for them; the master is sure to get his work done; and, just as the hand is active and willing, he gets the advantage of it, which is an encouragement.”

There was something honest and straightforward about the man’s manner and speech which pleased me; and I remarked also, that the negroes whom he met upon the road, showed him not only that respect which might proceed from fear of his authority, but a degree of affectionate familiarity, which could only be generated by kindness on his part. One big fellow, in a light cotton jacket, ran along by the side of his horse for a quarter of a mile,

with his hand upon the mane, talking to him about things he wanted done; and the women laughed and showed their white teeth, while they bobbed a curtsey, as if they were glad, rather than afraid, to see him.

Billy Byles, to whom all such matters of Virginia-detail were too familiar to be of any interest, whistled absently as we walked along; and it was only when my questions turned towards the fate of Bessy Davenport, that he woke up to some degree of attention.

“I have heard nothing of the young lady myself, sir,” said the overseer; “but as for that matter, we’ll soon get information. She is very much beloved about all this part of the country; and whoever these black devils hurt, I hardly think they would venture to hurt her.”

“I fear you calculate too much upon their forbearance,” I said. “Have you not heard how indiscriminate their rage has been?”

“Oh yes, sir,” he replied; “we have heard

a great deal about them, although we have been rather out of their way here. Some passed over the corner of the plantation, I hear, last night, on their way towards the Swamp; but they seemed to be flying in great haste, so the men say, and did not stop to talk with any one."

"They were too near the sheriff's quarters," said Billy Byles. "His people are all right and straight, are they not?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Byles," answered the overseer. "Not one of them stirred, or wanted to stir. I sat up all night; but I might just as well have gone to bed; for master is always just with them. He always will have his work done; but he requires no more than is fair. He never punishes a mistake, or even a folly, though he may reprimand it; but he punishes a fault, if he sees it was intentional, always a little within the law, and never till he has considered the matter full four-and-twenty hours. It is those who have been too hard

with them, or too soft with them, who are likely to suffer whenever there is a rising."

Thus talking, we rode along, partly through woods, partly through open fields, till we reached a spot, where, built round a little sort of amphitheatre, sloping downwards towards pleasant meadows or savannah, beyond which again appeared a wide extent of ragged forest-ground, with glimpses of gleaming water here and there—appeared thirty or forty very neat and tidy cabins. At the doors of several were groups of women and children; and a number of men with various implements of husbandry in their hands, appeared just setting out to their labour.

To a European eye, accustomed to nothing but white faces, the sight of a number of negroes gathered together is a curious spectacle, to which people do not easily get accustomed. But very soon, other feelings, as we rode up, carried me away from the interest I felt in the spectacle of so many of what old

Fuller calls, "God's images carved in ebony." The men rested at the sight of the overseer; the women rose; but, after a moment or two, some of them recognised me as aunt Bab's nephew, and as the man who had prevented them from being sold into another state.

Great and loud was the excitement and the clamour. The word passed from mouth to mouth. The women and the men surrounded me; the little boys and girls tumbled head over heels; and though I do not think the Virginian negroes are very clamorous, a scene of din and excitement succeeded which made Billy Byles laugh, caused the overseer to smile, and prevented me, for some time, from explaining the object of my coming.

At the first word, however, of probable danger to Bessy Davenport, everything was still. The capering and the singing and the laughing ceased; and the black, gleaming eyes were turned upon each other's faces, as if some terrible marvel had been told them.

“What! our missie?” cried an old woman at length, in a deep, horrified tone. “Our Bessy! Have they hurt her? Oh, I will tear out the hearts of them! But it can’t be! They darn’t.”

I explained to her and those around that all was in uncertainty—that Bessy and I had escaped from the house of Mr. Stringer; but I had lost her in the wood, and that she certainly was now missing.

Another silence fell upon them all; and it was clear, from the astonishment with which the tidings had been received, that Bessy had not found shelter there.

At length, one tall man, of about forty, stepped forward, and asked in an eager tone—

“How was she dressed, massa? Had she anything white about her?”

“Yes,” I answered; “she had a white shawl on, and a gown you might take for white, at a distance.”

The man mused, and spoke for a few mo-

ments in a low tone to a woman who had a baby in her arms.

In the meanwhile, a lad of nineteen or twenty came forward, saying—

“Didn’t you tell us, sir, aunt Jenny was with her? Missus’ cook that was.” (I nodded my head). “I’ll find her; she is my aunt, massa, and been as good as a mother to me.”

“We’ll find them both,” said the big man, turning round again. “We’ll find them both, living or dead. Massa Overseer, no offence, sir, I hope, but we can’t work to-day; because we must find Miss Bessy, and aunt Jenny. You know you can trust us. We’ll all be back before sun-down; but find them we must and we will. I think I know where to look.”

“Where, where?” I asked, eagerly.

“No matter, just yet,” answered the man. “Praps ’Im mistaken, but we’ll find her,

massa, be you sure of that, if there's a living man left of us."

"Well," I answered, "any one who brings me intelligence to the town of where Miss Bessy is, between this hour and to-morrow morning, shall have a reward of a hundred dollars. I trust, sir, you have no objection," I said, turning to the overseer, "against these good people seeking for the young lady."

"None whatever," he replied. "I am quite certain they will all come back; for I don't think any of them has had anything to complain of during his whole life."

"Never, sir, till our old missus die," said the tall man; "and never since we came here, I will say. Robert Thornton's time was a different case. The dirty nigger! he ought to have the racket."

He then turned to talk with his companions; and so eager were they all with the matter in hand, that they took very little farther notice

of us, and hardly seemed to perceive our departure. The overseer, it is true, remained with them wishing us a civil good day; and though I gave all credit to their zeal, I was not sorry they should have some one to direct it aright, who had more extended experience than themselves.

“ You are an extravagant fellow, Sir Richard,” said Billy Byles, as we rode back towards the town. “ Your promise of the hundred dollars won’t help the finding of poor Bessy a bit.”

“ I must leave no means or inducement untried,” I said, in as calm and tranquil a tone as I could assume. “ Miss Davenport, you see, was under my protection. I cannot help blaming myself for having left her at all; and every one will have just cause for censuring me severely, if I neglect any means of discovering what has become of her.”

Billy Byles laughed aloud.

“My dear Sir Richard,” he said, “I dare say you have got a thousand good reasons for your eagerness; but I divine one little one which you do not mention, and that is just the one which would make me hunt up Louisa Thornton in the same manner, if she were in the same predicament.—Come along, here’s a place where we can gallop; and though Jordan is a hard road to travel, the sooner we get back to Jerusalem the better.

CHAPTER IV.

I COULD not help thinking, as we rode along, now through deep woods, now across small pieces of cultivated ground, what a favorable country this would be for a desultory guerilla sort of warfare; and I easily conceived how the Indians, in former days, had maintained their woody fastnesses against all the advantages of European discipline. Indeed, had the insurgents, on the present occasion, but known how to profit by the opportunities the country afforded—had they kept their hands from any

indiscriminate massacre, and contented themselves with picking off their assailants from behind the screen which the forest afforded in every direction, they might, and certainly would, have been beaten at last, but they would have been much more successful in the beginning, and maintained the contest for a greater length of time.

I did not feel at all sure, that they would not have a shot at us from the denser parts of the forest, as we passed along through the narrow paths which we had to thread in order to reach the high road; and I kept my gun upon my knee, to give it back again in case of need.

But the great highway to Suffolk, was reached at length; and on we went in more security. A large, lumbering, heavy, stage-coach passed us, with its tall springs and huge body, looking like a great solitary capon, and quite unlike the neat, compact, dashing vehicles which roll along with such tremendous

speed over our smooth English roads. It stopped for a moment, to give time for the passengers and driver to ask us—"What news?" and then went on again, rolling and wallowing through the sand, and the ruts, and the holes, like a porpoise in a rough sea.

About two miles further on, just as we were coming to the opening of another road branching to the left, I heard a well known voice exclaiming—

"Hi, massa, hi!"

Looking round, I saw Zed just starting up from a large log on which he had been sitting. He ran as quickly towards us as his crooked leg would admit; and, coming close to my horse, he said, in a low, mysterious, and important voice—

"Got news of Miss Bessy, massa. Saw an ole woman in her cabin half way between Doctor Blunt's and Mr. Hiram Shield's; and she tell me that she saw four men and two women a-horse-back, pass by last night just as it was

growing dark. They were all white men, and one was a white woman. She says, she swears, she was Miss Bessy. T'other woman's face she could not see ; but she says she was mighty fat, so that must be aunt Jenny."

"Which way did they take?" I demanded, though I did not exactly see why there should not be other fat women in the world besides aunt Jenny.

"Oh, they have gone to Jerusalem, of course," cried Billy Byles. "It was some of Halliday's party, depend upou it. Very likely they split into two ; but they have all taken to Jerusalem, you may be sure of it. You see in the crowd and confusion last night, no one could find anything, and the search for Bessy was like looking for a needle in a pottle of hay."

"Ole woman thinks they took t'other way," said Zed ; "but you see, massa, her cabin just stand at de corner, where you can see no way at all ; for they could turn either right or left

when they got a hundred yards farther; and she only judge by the sound of the horses' feet."

"Oh, they've gone to Jerusalem," said Billy Byles. And turning to Zed, he added, "She was quite sure they were white men?"

"Oh, she swore by Gorry, dey was white men," answered Zed. "No doubt of dat."

"Then she is safe, at all events," answered Billy Byles; "and we had better make the best of our way on to town and see for her. So that she hasn't fallen into the hands of these devils, we have no occasion to be afraid."

Zed's intelligence certainly was a great relief to my mind; yet I was not entirely at my ease; for there were various points which seemed strange to me, and I could not feel satisfied till they were accounted for. Nevertheless, Billy Byles's plan seemed the only feasible one for the moment. Therefore,

telling Zed to follow as fast as he could, I rode towards Jerusalem.

We found the town somewhat more orderly and quiet than it had been on the preceding day, although it appeared that several parties of military had arrived during the night and that morning, and two pieces of artillery were planted in the square. Provisions had arrived likewise; and breakfast was going on with great zeal in the inn and the different houses which had given shelter to the fugitives.

In the inn, we found Mr. Thornton and all his family; but his first question showed me that he himself had obtained no satisfactory information.

“What news do you bring?” he said. “Do aunt Bab’s people know anything of our poor girl?”

“Nothing whatever,” I replied; “but we have since got some important intelligence.”

And I told him all we had heard from Zed.

“That is satisfactory, at all events,” he said, with a brighter look. “We shall hear more soon, and most likely see her come trotting in in the course of the day. I dare say she has gone to some plantation where the people are on their guard, and feel secure. At all events, she is safe, and our worst fears are allayed.”

He then went on to inform me that he had spoken with the young ladies whom Colonel Halliday had brought in, and found that Bessy had certainly never been with them. He had brought them, however, Mr. Thornton said, from a house quite close to the high-road after having made a tour with his party through the woods in search of the insurgents. He had returned on his search, immediately after having lodged them in safety; and he might have met with Bessy either before or afterwards.

“The only strange thing is,” continued Mr. Thornton, “that Halliday himself has never returned; but I trust he will appear very soon.”

Mrs. Thornton, who always was rather of a despondent disposition, here expressed a hope—which, with her, generally meant a dread of an exactly opposite event—that Colonel Halliday had not met with a superior party of the negroes and been defeated.

A friend of mine, who was somewhat of a susceptible and apprehensive character himself, but who took especial care never to express any gloomy forebodings, used to declare that he always eschewed the society of what he called *dread-ful* people; “for when I am in a fright about anything myself,” he said, “they are sure to drive me half mad with all sorts of possibilities.”

Now, though I do not intend to apply the term *dread-ful* to my excellent friend, Mrs. Thornton, yet I did wish she had spared me this suggestion. I had argued myself into believing that there was no doubt of Bessy’s safety, although, of course, I could not be altogether easy till I saw her again; and,

though the phantom which Mrs. Thornton conjured up was not very tangible, it made me uncomfortable. If it was not probable, it was within the range of possibility; and upon it my mind rested with very unpleasant sensations.

“Pooh! nonsense, mamma!” said Louisa Thornton. “Mr. Halliday had too many men with him for anything like that. Did you not hear how they were all scattered and dispersed at Doctor Blunt’s? In the meantime, Sir Richard is getting no breakfast, and must be half starving.”

“And so am I too,” said Billy Byles; “but you don’t care whether *I* starve or not, Miss Louisa.”

“Oh, I have no fears about you,” she answered. “You will never starve when there’s anything to be got to eat. You had better make haste, however, and get down to the dining-room, for there is a famishing multitude

round, which will leave not a morsel if you do not fight for it."

What she said was literally true. The breakfast we got was very scanty, although Billy Byles did almost fight for it. But it served at all events to appease our hunger; and, what was perhaps of more consequence to me, to fill up some short space of time in which I had nothing else to do. Active exertion was indeed most necessary for me; but for the time, the opportunity was wanting.

Zed had not yet returned to the town; and my horse was too tired, what with the morning's ride and the fatigue he had undergone during the preceeding night and day, to go any farther without some repose. Nothing was to be done, then, but to wander about amongst the various groups in the town, to converse with those whom I knew, and to gather the scattered pieces of intelligence which were brought in from the country.

All seemed agreed that the negroes had been completely dispersed the night before; that they had lost heart and hope; and that the insurrection was at an end. Several families who had taken refuge in the town, moved back to their own dwellings; and some parties of the militia and volunteers marched out to return home.

Still Colonel Halliday did not appear, and still no farther intelligence came of Bessy Davenport.

Zed came in about two hours after Billy Byles and I reached the town, although the distance he had to walk was not more than four miles; but he assured me, he had been making all sorts of inquiries; and I doubt not, but what he said was true; for where is the negro who can pass another without stopping to ask him some question? After I had heard his excuse for the delay, I told him to get the horse he usually rode, ready for me, adding—

“He must be rested by this time; and if Colonel Halliday does n’t come in in an hour, I shall go out to talk with this old woman, you mention, myself.”

“You had better take me with you, massa,” said Zed. “You’ll not find out much by yourself. People will tell ole Zed, when they won’t tell you. But dere’s dat free yellow man looking after you, I think, where you sleep last night.”

I looked round in the direction to which his eyes were turned, and saw good old Jacobus standing at a little distance, apparently waiting respectfully till my conversation with Zed was over.

“What is it Jacobus?” I said, approaching him. “Have you anything to tell me?”

“Yes, sir,” said the man, speaking in a low and mysterious tone. “There’s a boy on the bridge wants to see you. He won’t come into the town for he seems afraid of the soldiers,

and the cannon ; but he says he has a message for you."

I turned hastily away, and walked towards the bridge. There were two or three people at the nearer end, but no one was upon it except a man driving a cart and a young boy of perhaps thirteen years old, who was mounted upon the rail and swinging himself backwards and forwards over the water. He was as black as ebony ; and I had no recollection of having seen him before. But he grinned from ear to ear as I came up, evidently recognizing me ; and, dismounting from his rail, he ran forward, saying :

" Hercules say, mas'r, he got news already ob Miss Bessy. You don't leave de town, till you hear from him again."

" And who is Hercules, my good friend ?" I asked.

" Oh, our Hercules," answered the lad, with a look of wonder at my ignorance.

“De great big nigger. You saw he dis mornin’.”

“And has he got intelligence already?” I inquired. “He must have been very quick. It is hardly four hours since I saw him.”

“Ah dis nigger run all de way,” cried the boy, “right troo de woods—neber stop for notting.”

“Then you must need something, my good boy,” I replied. “Come into the town with me, and I’ll see if I can get you some breakfast.”

“Oh, no, mas’r,” answered the boy. “Had good drink out there,” and he pointed to the river. “But mind you now, you wait till Hercules come. He can want you in a minute, he say. He am very fierce about someting, and get half de nigger together and went away again, so soon he sent me off.”

I tried to get some farther information from the boy, but it was in vain. He evidently knew

nothing more than the message with which he had been charged ; and, giving him some pieces of silver for his trouble, with which he seemed mightily delighted, I let him go.

On returning to the inn, I found the dining hall occupied by a party of gentlemen, arranging their plans for a very melancholy duty. This was, to divide the district in which the massacre had taken place, into sections ; and, in parties of sufficient force, to visit the houses which had suffered, in order to take the necessary steps to dispose decently of the bodies of the victims. A good-looking military man was in the chair, with a calm and intelligent countenance. I found afterwards that this was General Eppes, the commandant of the district. He was just addressing a few words of advice and exhortation to those who were about to set out.

“I believe, gentlemen,” he said, “that all danger may be considered over. The insurrection may be said to be at an end ; though

several of the leaders have escaped as yet. I would advise you, however, to go well armed, and five or six in a body, lest you should fall in with any scattered party of these unfortunate people. I would beseech you, however, should you meet with any of them, to be calm, and to forbear from anything like violence or cruelty. Let them be brought in to await the action of the law; but do not permit indignation and anger to move you to acts as barbarous as their own. You may think it strange, and perhaps improper, that I should address such advice to you at all; but I have just received intelligence of a most brutal outrage committed upon some unoffending negroes by persons who should know better. My good friend, the sheriff, has just set out to inquire into the whole matter; and, I trust, will bring the offenders to punishment. For it is dangerous and intolerable, on an occasion like this, when the restoration of tranquillity depends as much upon justice and forbearance,

as upon courage and activity, that the peaceable and well-disposed should be treated like the malcontent and the guilty; especially," he added, in a very marked tone, "where private malevolence may be suspected as the motive for a cruel and unjustifiable act. This is all I wish to say. But I think it is worth your attention; for I know that many who hear me must set forth with feelings highly irritated, which will be naturally increased by the sad spectacle they will have to witness."

His tone was calm, firm and dignified; and he was listened to with evident attention and respect. Some, indeed, wished that he would give farther explanations in regard to the particular case of outrage to which he had alluded. But he replied, after a moment's thought—

"Gentlemen, my information is vague; and I do not like to give circulation to rumours

affecting the character and conduct of any gentleman in the neighbourhood. We have had too many rumours already; and, until the particulars are well ascertained, I shall say no more. The matter is in the hands of the sheriff, whose energy and activity you all know; and it will be thoroughly investigated."

The meeting then began to break up, organizing itself into different parties to perform the mournful duty they had undertaken. Each selected its particular little district to act in; and each chose a leader for itself to direct its proceedings.

This spirit of organization is one of the most peculiar and serviceable traits of the American character. In other countries, a mob is a mob; every one strives for the lead—every one tries to cram his own opinion down the throats of others. But no sooner do a number of Americans meet for any purpose whatsoever, than

the first thing they do, is to organize: they choose their leaders and their officers; and thus, very often, the most disorderly acts are performed in the most orderly manner. This is one of the ancient characteristics of the Anglo-Saxons, showing itself amongst their remote descendents. Our pagan, piratical, barbarous, blood-thirsty ancestors, had no sooner taken possession of Great Britain, than they devised, and carried out, one of the most beautiful systems of organization ever conceived; and if both Englishmen and Americans have, as I am afraid is the case, inherited some of the piratical propensities of our worthy forefathers, they have come in for their share of the better qualities also.

Mr. Henry Thornton was placed at the head of one party; Billy Byles of another. And I think about seven little bodies of men were formed to visit the different houses where massacres had been committed. I was asked by Mr. Thornton

to join his party ; but I explained to him that I wished to remain in the town till Colonel Halliday made his appearance ; and I besought him if he obtained any intelligence of Bessy to let me know at once.

“ Halliday’s absence is very strange,” said Mr. Thornton ; “ but let me advise you, Sir Richard, if I may do so without seeming impertinent, to deal with him calmly when he does come in. There are various circumstances which may make him irritable in regard to any matter where Bessy is concerned ; and I think we have had pistols and bullets enough for some time to come.”

Thus closed our conversation ; and when the various parties had set out on their way, I betook myself to the open space before the inn, not alone to be ready for whatever might occur, but to dissipate my impatience, as it were, in a way that could not be annoying to others. I ought, perhaps, in politeness, to

have gone to sit with Mrs. Thornton and her daughters in the balcony; but I felt that I was not fit for society; and that my company could not be very desirable to any one in the mood which was then upon me.

CHAPTER V.

ABOUT half-an-hour had passed, during which I had walked up and down, exchanging a few words, from time to time, with different gentlemen in the street, when I saw a negro-lad coming at a quick pace from the side of the bridge. I thought I recollected his face, though I have always found it very difficult to distinguish one of his race from another, by the features, when there is no mixture of the white. I accordingly advanced to meet him,

and saw at once that it was of me he was in search.

“Come along as quick as possible, mas'r,” he said. “You is wanted down dar very much. Mas'r sheriff gone down; but you wanted too. I met mas'r sheriff on the road. Poor Hercules and two other is shot. Dey tink him die, and he want to see you.”

“Shot!” I exclaimed. “Good Heaven! by whom?”

The boy had been speaking low; but he now dropped his voice to a whisper, while he replied—

“Mas'r William Thornton, and his son Bob, and dat Irish driver.”

I paused to ask no farther questions; but called to Zed to bring out the horses as fast as possible, which he did with more than his usual alacrity. My own beast still looked very tired, and stood with his head drooping. I determined therefore to take the horse that Zed

usually rode, and to go alone, although my good servant, who always had a sort of protecting air with him, as if he thought that, as a white man and an Englishman, I was not at all fit to take care of myself in Virginia, urged me strongly to take him with me.

I rode away without him, however; proceeding slowly, till I was beyond the town, with the negro-lad walking by my side. But we had hardly passed the bridge, when he said—

“You know de way, dou’t you, mas’r?” I nodded my head, and he added—“You had better get on den. Fear poor Ercles die first. Dis nigger come after.”

I marked the road too well to miss it; and putting my horse into as quick a pace as possible, I hurried forward till I reached the turning which went down by the sheriff’s plantations.

Rapid riding is rather favourable to rapid

thought ; but I had very few data on which to base conclusions in the present case. This event, which the boy had communicated to me, was evidently the outrage to which General Eppes had alluded shortly before ; but I puzzled myself in vain to assign some motive for such an act on the part of Robert Thornton. Could it be mere malice because the slaves had been taken out of his hands ? I could not believe in such brutality. Yet what other inducement could he have ? It was all in vain ; and, turning through the woods, I was soon near the sheriff's house.

I found no one there, however, except some women and children, who told me that their master had gone down to the old quarters. One woman was crying bitterly, and I asked her if poor Hercules was dead. She said she believed not ; but every one said he would die.

No further information could I get ; for the poor creatures seemed ignorant of everything

except that some of their friends, perhaps relations, had been dangerously hurt.

On I went, then, as fast as possible, till I reached the group of cabins which I have before described. Round the door of one of them the greater part of the negroes seemed to have collected; and thither I rode, judging at once that the wounded man lay there. A boy sprang forward to hold my horse. Another whispered as I dismounted—

“Doctor’s wid him, sir.”

But I went in notwithstanding; and there, upon the lowly, pallet-bed, saw extended the large frame of the negro I had beheld in the morning, full of life and energy, but now apparently reduced to almost infant weakness. Bending over him with what, I suppose, was a pair of forceps plunged into a wound in his right side, was Doctor Christy, the surgeon who had attended me when suffering from a much lighter wound. The poor negro’s eyes were closed, and he did not open them till the ball was extracted; but

when he did, and they fell upon me, he raised himself a little on his elbow, as if about to speak.

“There! lie still, my good fellow, lie still,” said the surgeon. “We have got the bullet out; keep quiet and all will go well.”

“I want to speak with that gentleman—I *must* speak with him, though I die. I’se going to die anyhow, I know dat; and I will speak with him when I can.”

“I hope he is likely to recover, Mr. Christy,” I said advancing.

“I hope so,” answered the surgeon, in a somewhat doubtful tone. “But he must keep quiet, and not speak much; for I am not sure that the lower edge of the lung has not been touched.”

While he spoke, he was busily engaged in putting on compresses and bandages; but the negro eagerly beckoned me towards him, and judging that he would not remain quiet till he

had said what he wished to say, I walked up and bent down my head, telling him to speak slowly and calmly.

“Miss Bessy was dere, I’s e sure,” said the poor man. “Bob Thornton never shoot us for asking after her, if she warn’t. She mayn’t be dere now, for I dar say he send her away, ’case she saw all he do.”

“Then was it Robert Thornton himself who shot you?” I asked. “I thought he was still too ill to move.”

“Ay, but he shot me himself,” said the negro. “He came to de window in his dressing-gown, and leaned de gun on de chair. Ole Bill and de two Irishmen shot de others; but *he* shot me. But hark’ee, mas’r, if you and sheriff don’t find Miss Bessy, go right across de Swamp. He got de ole house dere—right across, mind, straight east. You find her dere, I tink. Dat’s anoder state. He won’t keep her in Virginy after what he hab done.”

“I cannot really let this go on,” said Doctor Christy. “The poor man’s life depends upon his being quiet.”

“Well, good-bye, Hercules,” I said. “I will see you to-morrow.”

“Ah, you bring me word dat Miss Bessy found all safe,” answered the wounded man, “Dat do me more good nor anything.”

I drew the surgeon towards the door, round which the other negroes had remained all the time in perfect silence, and asked him in a low tone if it would not be better to have the man’s deposition taken down, as he evidently believed himself to be dying.”

“What’s the use of his deposition?” asked the surgeon drily. “Don’t you know a negro can’t testify against a white man? His voice will be quite as powerful in the grave as when he is living. But I think he will do well. These negroes always think they will die when anything is the matter.”

No good could be done by staying; and deeper interest called me away.

“Can any of you show me the way to Mr. William Thornton’s house?” I asked, speaking generally to the little crowd without.

“Here’s de nigger who can,” said an active young negro springing forward. “We’ll soon catch up de sheriff. He not long gone. I can run all de way. I wish I hab a gun,” he continued, looking at the one which was strapped across my shoulders. “I shoot Bob Thornton wid all my heart.”

“Well, come along,” I said, with feelings too much akin to his own to reprove him for his sanguinary wishes. “Take the shortest way, and never mind wide paths or narrow; we’ll force our way through.”

On he bounded like a deer, without care of brambles or thorns, of rough places or swamps; and, to say truth, though he was on foot, and I was on horseback, I had a good deal of difficulty to keep up with him.

The way was rather long; and the by-paths he took did not strike a wider road, for at least five miles; but when we had gained the more open way, we almost immediately found ourselves in the presence of the sheriff, with a considerable party of white men, and two or three blacks. Amongst the rest, I instantly recognised Robert Thornton, very pale, but apparently quite convalescent. There was an elder man, whom I took to be his father, from the strong personal resemblance, though the latter was thin, fox-faced, and eager-looking, with that peculiar, quick, and hungry aspect which I have never seen except in men who have spent a life and employed all their energies in a fruitless pursuit of wealth by cunning and dirty means—a look of shrewd activity, rendered almost fierce by disappointment. Behind, with hand-cuffs on them, were the two Irishmen whom I remembered well to have seen with Robert Thornton when he was attempting to carry off

Aunt Bab's servants. The rest were men whom I did not know.

The moment the sheriff perceived me, he drew up his horse, and said—

“ I am sorry to tell you, Sir Richard, Miss Davenport is certainly not there, although we had every reason to believe that she was. I had not, indeed, time to pursue my inquiries as far as I could wish ; for my other duties call me to Jerusalem as fast as possible. But I searched every room and every cabin round the house ; and, whether she has been there or not, she is not there now.”

“ You will take notice, Mr. Sheriff,” cried Robert Thornton, before I could say anything in reply, “ that I again protest against this proceeding as altogether illegal and unwarranted ; and I give you notice, I shall undoubtedly bring an action against you for false imprisonment, which you know quite well will lie.”

“ You will do as you are advised, Mr.

Thornton," replied the sheriff, coolly. "The district is in an exceptional state just now, and the presumptions are very strong against you. But, as I said before, my mind is perfectly made up as to my course. You have not often known me abandon my determinations; and I shall not suffer any of you four gentlemen to depart till you have given sufficient bail to meet any charge which may be preferred against you."

"Why, you have not even a pretence, sir," said the elder Mr. Thornton. "Nothing but the idle tattle of a parcel of niggers."

The sheriff smiled sarcastically.

"You forget," he said, "we may yet have some curious testimony from Colonel Halliday, and various gentlemen of his party; and, moreover," he continued, more slowly, and emphatically, "some testimony which, though it is not present, and may not even be in this state at the present moment may become available hereafter. At all events, I will take

my chance of what is upon the cards, and please God, I will carry you to Jerusalem this night."

I could see that the countenances of Robert Thornton and his father both fell considerably at some parts of the sheriff's reply, which they understood better than I did, and they did not attempt to make any farther opposition.

"Sir Richard," said the sheriff, beckoning me a little aside, "you had better return with us. You will not find the lady there; and, without guides and some force, I don't think you will be able to do anything to-night."

"I will go on at all events," I answered. "I have got some hints from that poor fellow whom they have wounded, which I want to follow up at once. I shall probably be back to-night, or at latest, to-morrow."

"Well, take care what you do," he replied. "Remember you are not in your own country. But I shall be round in the direction which I suppose you are taking early to-morrow; and,

if there should be any difficulty, may be able to give you assistance, though I think this man's creatures will be completely cowed when they find he is apprehended. Indeed, that Irishman there on the left, is going to turn state's-evidence, or I am very much mistaken. I would go with you; but I have a great deal to do to-night. Mind what you do in the Swamp; for people have got in there who have never got out again. Now, gentlemen, we will go forward, if you please. Mr. Thornton, you will have the goodness to cease your communications with that man. I wish him to give his evidence unprompted; and as it is a matter which may affect his own life and the lives of two or three others, he had better be permitted to speak freely. I suppose you are aware this district is under martial-law at present."

"Then your functions are suspended," said Robert Thornton, sharply.

"Excuse me, sir," said the sheriff. "I am

acting under due authority ; and, at all events, might makes right in the present instance, as you will find."

Thus saying, he rode on ; and as Robert Thornton passed me, though his tongue said nothing, his look said a great deal. - Poor Hercules had told me to go straight East across the Swamp, if I did not find dear Bessy at Mr. William Thornton's house ; and the sheriff assured me she was not there, so that I was inclined at first to leave the house, which was now in sight on my right, along a path which seemed long beaten.

On second thought, however, I determined to go up to the house and make further inquiries ; not that I doubted the sheriff, or had the vanity to attribute to myself superior acumen ; but I have often remarked that where one man of intelligence has been unable to obtain information, or get a clue to some secret, a second man, perhaps inferior to himself, will stumble, by accident, upon the very thing that

is wanted. In fact, there are two sides to every hedge ; one man takes one, and another man takes the other ; and where the form is, there the hare will be.

At the door of Mr. Thornton's house, stood two or three negro women and one man. Springing from my horse without hesitation, I gave the rein to my companion, and walked up to them in a familiar manner. They seemed a dull, sullen, heavy set of people, indeed the lowest specimens of the negro race I had yet met with. Yet the conduct and the character of the master must have been that which had brutalized them, for they were exactly of the same race as all the rest round about ; and indeed most of them seemed to have some portion of white blood in their veins.

"How long is it since Miss Davenport went?" I said, taking out my watch.

"I don't know anything about her," answered the man, in a surly tone.

“I didn’t ask you, my good friend,” I said ; “I asked the woman who attended upon her. You were the girl,” I continued, picking out a young woman of two-and-twenty, who looked cleaner, and was more neatly dressed than the rest. “You are the girl who waited upon her last night, are not you ?”

She hesitated and stammered in her reply, and seemed a good deal confused by the directness of my assertion. At length, however, she blurted forth—

“Don’t know what you are talking about, mas’r.”

In the meanwhile, the man had walked slowly away as if he had had enough of my questions ; and, turning to an old woman who was one of the party, I said—

“At all events, goody, you can tell me where aunt Jenny is—Mrs. Bab Thornton’s cook. She is my servant now, you know, and I don’t want her ill-used or neglected.”

“I don’t know nothing of nobody, mas’r,”

replied the old woman. "But I do know we'se got to obey orders; and if we stands here talking to strangers about mas'r's 'fairs, we'se likely to get flogged."

"Neither Mr. Thornton or his son will ever flog you again," I answered; "for they have both gone to prison for what they did here this morning."

"Can't tell, don't know, mas'r," answered the old woman. And she beat a retreat into the house, followed by another somewhat younger than herself.

The youngest of the party, however, stood her ground; and, after a quick glance round, apparently to see that no one was watching, she gave a rapid movement of her thumb, over her shoulder towards the wood, which, on the eastern side, came within two hundred yards of the house. My eye followed her gesture, which certainly was not the exact direction I had intended to take; and, as I could perceive

no horse-path, I looked I suppose, a little puzzled.

“You go down dere quick,” said the girl, in a whisper; “follow de track, you find it.”

Then raising her voice aloud, she said, evidently intending her words for the ears of others—

“Can’t tell you anything, mas’r. Don’t know; so no use your waiting.

Beckoning the lad to follow with my horse, I crossed the field in the direction she had pointed out, guided by a narrow, and not very distinct, track of footsteps, which, however, widened out and became more like a beaten path, as we approached the wood. There two or three other little paths converged; and I found I could pass on horseback easily enough.

How far I had to go, I know not; nor what might be likely to occur on the way. But, after some consideration and some doubt, I determined to send back my companion, and

proceed on my journey alone. As soon as we were completely out of sight, of the house, I took the rein from him, saying—

“I will not take you any farther, my good boy. I think you had better find some other way back, so that they may not see, from the house, that you have left me.”

“Oh, I do dat, easily, mas'r,” answered the lad; “go down de edge of de Swamp and round.”

“First, tell me,” I said, “where does this road lead?”

“Ole Billy Thornton’s ole house,” answered the youth.

“But this is not, I think, the road that poor Hercules intended me to take?” I added, interrogatively.

“Dar say he meant the waggon-road; but it is all de same,” replied the lad. “Dey both come out close together, and dat ar gal jog her tumb dis way. I see her, dough she were mighty quick.”

And he laughed with the peculiar laugh of his people.

“Then I cannot miss my way to the old place,” I observed.

“Oh, dear, no,” answered the boy; “only just follow de track; keep always de biggest; and when you ride 'cross de savannah, look where him very green. Don't you go dere, for he's very deep dere. But keep where him brown, and bushy, and where you see ox or horse-feet.”

His directions were very good, as I found afterwards; although I will confess that I had no idea at the time of the sort of place I was venturing into, called, and not without reason, “The Great Dismal Swamp.” I am told that in the spring of the year, nothing can be more deceitfully beautiful than the aspect which it puts on. The whole ground, even in the most plashy places, is covered with flowers. The trees are literally robed and loaded with the yellow jasmine, the trumpet honey-suckle, and

other climbing plants. The cedars and junipers mingle their darker colours with the light green foliage of the spring; and the very snakes as they glide across the path, or curl among the branches, look as if they were masses of living gems. In the height of summer, or the beginning of autumn, the scene is very different. Still, however, there is something grand about it from its very gloom.

A profound sense of loneliness came upon me as I rode on. I don't know what it was, or how to account for the feeling, but the sensation produced by the aspect of these woods was different from that of any other forest-scenery through which I had passed in Virginia. Where patches of woodland, very often of considerable extent, had been scattered amongst the cultivated ground, one always felt that one should soon reach free air and human associations again; but here, it seemed as if one were at the end of man's domain—as if

the ground one trod upon never had been, never could be, cultivated; that there was a bar, and a proscription, and a curse against it—that one was proceeding away from civilization, and tending towards nothing.

The first half mile was through dense, deep forest, with tall, thin trees, rising up so close together, that they evidently had not room to grow; each struggling with his fellow, as, in too densely a crowded population, every man stunted his neighbour in his own struggle for life.

Then came a track, where I know not what catastrophe seemed to have terminated this overcrowded contention. For three or four square miles, the scene was one of desolation and decay. Fallen trees, stunted bushes, low junipers, plashy pools, thickets of laurel and ivy, silver gleams of small ponds, scanty lines of savannah—here, a dried-up patch of black mud, cracked into deep fissures; there, an undrainable spot, where the horse sank above his

knees at every step in slimy ooze; now, a tangled brake, where a hundred men might have concealed themselves; and now, a swampy piece, from the long grass of which, a tall, white bird would spring up and soar away,—such were the objects that presented themselves on every side; and when viewed from the rather more elevated ground, by which the track was approached, showed like a wild and dismal moor with here and there a clump of tall trees rising above the rest of the expanse, and a deep, lowering belt of forest in the distance, girding it in on every side.

On I rode, however, my horse sometimes stumbling over the thorn-trees, sometimes sinking almost to his girths in the deep, black mud. The sun declining in the sky, and the gloomy aspect of everything round me, sank into my heart, and depressed my spirits.

Oh, how closely allied in this mysterious state of being is the material and the moral—how susceptible is even the soul itself of

the influences poured in upon it through the channels of the external senses! The memories of all that had been taking place during the last two days seemed to combine themselves with the gloomy features of the scene around me. Hope diminished, apprehension increased. Imagination triumphed over reason; and I felt as if I were going on towards sorrow and disappointment and misfortunes.

Such gloomy fits have sometimes possessed me before; but it is man's privilege and his duty to triumph over them; and whenever I feel the shadow of the cloud, I try to nerve my heart to resist, and to call up faith and trust to support mere human resolution.

“There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow.” “Not a hair of our head falls to the ground unnumbered.” And if so, God is with us. Onward!

CHAPTER VI.

THE sun was approaching his hour of setting ; and the scene, lately so dreary and desolate, was now resplendent with colours which defy all description. It was not merely the purple and gold with which, in the weakness of language, we are forced to designate the hues, which neither pen nor pencil can bring before the mind—but it was the sparkling vividness, the transparent splendour of those colours—making them as spirit compared to mere matter—which spread an atmosphere-like enchantment over

the scene, changing its rude features, brightening its dull heaviness, glorifying its gloom, and giving startling variety to its monotony. It was like the wonderful power of imagination, seizing upon the most incongruous materials, and harmonising them in the life-like light that streams from itself.

The mind, still subject, like the skin of theameleon, to the aspect of things round it, took a brighter tone from the changes of the sky.

Suddenly, however, I heard, as it seemed to me, at some little distance, a voice calling. At first, I was hardly certain whether it was not the cry of some wild bird; but presently I distinguished clearly the tones of a human voice; and, reining in my jaded horse, I turned round and looked in the direction from which it seemed to proceed. Running my eye over the ground, I could perceive nothing for a moment or two; but there were so many stumps and bushes and broken trees, that a hundred men

might have been near me in that dim and scattered light without my perceiving their proximity. Still, however, the voice called, and I thought I could distinguish the word, "Mas'r."

Cautiously, I turned my horse amongst the bushes, and rode on towards the spot from which the sound seemed to come; and I soon began to discern the outline of a figure sitting at the foot of a tall, conical cypress tree, almost assuming the form of one of the beautiful cypresses of Eastern Europe, and perched upon a little knoll, rising above the rest of the Swamp.

It was not Bessy's figure; but, with no light satisfaction as I drew near to her and more near, I made out the heavy outline of good aunt Jenny.

No words can express the good woman's joy and satisfaction when she saw me; and my own was little less; for I knew that I should now have a clue, and that some light, at least,

would be thrown upon the mystery which had kept my mind for so many hours in a state of terror and anxiety.

Poor Jenny, however, was weak and exhausted—to such a degree even, that she could hardly speak in answer to my questions; and the first consideration was how to revive her failing strength. At the distance which I supposed we were from any human habitation, no food, of course, was to be procured: night was coming on fast, and there seemed no prospect but of her dying there actually of starvation; till suddenly I remembered the hunting-flask of brandy which I had brought from the house of the hapless Mr. Travis, and of which I had never thought since. It was still in the pocket of my jacket, and it proved indeed a most seasonable relief to the poor woman, who soon recovered sufficiently to be able to tell me, vaguely and confusedly, that some twenty minutes after I had left her and Bessy in the wood, a party of white men, headed by Colonel

Halliday, had forced their way through the bushes and hurried them away, offering to lodge them securely in Jerusalem.

At Bessy's request, the leader promised, she said, to leave two men on the spot to give me warning when I returned; and poor Jenny declared that she heard him herself give the order to that effect. When they reached the path, however, they found more men and horses there; and the party separated into two divisions. Everything was in confusion, the good woman said; and before they were well aware of what was happening, she and Miss Davenport were riding away with one division, while Colonel Halliday took another direction with the other. It was not till they had gone some hundred yards that either Bessy or herself perceived that old William Thornton was with their party.

I need not enter into more details, as I shall have to speak of them more fully hereafter, and as the good woman's account was very

confused ; I learned, however, from her that Bessy and herself had been detained at Mr. Thornton's house all night, but kept separate from each other ; that she, at least, had had no food, and that she had seen a party of three or four of aunt Bab's negroes who came to the house, civilly inquiring if Miss Davenport was there, fired at from the windows without the slightest provocation. Immediately after that, Bessy had been placed upon horseback against her will and carried away.

“They turned me out as soon as she was gone,” said aunt Jenny, “without even a cup of cold water ; but I knew very well where they took her ; and so I came on after my darling. But you see I got faint, master, and thought I should die for want here in the Swamp.”

“But what did they take her away for, Jenny ?” I inquired. “Why did they not let her remain where she was ?”

“Why she see'd them shoot poor 'Ercles and the other two,” replied the old woman ; “and

they knew she would witness against them ; so they got her out of de state, and will keep her till it's all blown over. Dat's de reason, I am sure."

"Then why did they not send you away too?" I asked.

"'Cause I'm a coloured woman, and my oath worth nothing," answered aunt Jenny.

"But if they have taken her into another State, how shall we ever find her?" I exclaimed, almost in despair.

"Oh, she close by—not two miles off," she answered. "Why we are in Nort Carolina now."

"Well, take a little more brandy, aunty," I said. "I will lift you on my horse, and we will go on, if you can show me the best way ; for it is beginning to grow darkish."

She would fain have walked, declaring that she was quite able, and that the brandy had done her "a mighty power of good."

But I would have my own way ; and we

made our road forward, just as the last glowing spot of the sun's disk sank below the horizon. He left a bright and beautiful twilight behind him, however; and we had no difficulty in finding our way onward; the road soon after beginning to rise out of the Swamp into the firmer ground beyond.

CHAPTER VII.

THOUGH it might be called night when we came in view of a house which Mr. William Thornton had formerly occupied, and which his people still called the old place, or the old quarters, everything around was distinctly visible by the pale, whitish light which often, in this part of the world, lingers long in the sky after the sun is down. It was a desolate-looking scene, in which everything spoke of neglect and decay. In the fields which had been once cultivated and probably exhausted,

young self-sown pine-plants might be seen springing up wherever the ground was not too thickly covered with weeds. Fences there were none, except some fragments round a kitchen garden at the side of the house, which seemed the only spot still cultivated. The house itself, though not actually tumbling down, was sadly dilapidated. Some of the rooms had not even the window-frames in them ; and in several others the glass was gone or broken.

I never could make out how it is that an uninhabited house always gets its windows broken. Can it be that the persecution which always dogs misery, extends itself to inanimate objects, and that the same spirit which leads a dog to bark at a beggar, on no other pretext but his rags, leads the hand of mischief to hurry on ruin wherever it sees it commenced ?

I marched straight up to the front-door, and aunt Jenny slipped quietly off the horse, while I tried the door, and knocked with my knuckles

on finding it locked. The head of an old negro, covered with white wool, was speedily put out of a window above; and I was saluted with the words, spoken rather sharply—

“What you want, mas'r? Can't get in dere.”

“I want a night's lodging, and something to eat,” I answered, boldly. “I have travelled a long way, and can't go farther. Come down and open the door.”

“Can't, mas'r,” answered the man, with a low chuckle. “Got de rheumatiz very bad. My ole ooman out, and she got de key.”

That the man was lying, there could be no doubt; and I determined to get into the house by some means, whatever might be the risk. I looked round to see if there was any window near enough to the ground for me to force it open; and then, for the first time, perceived that good aunt Jenny had disappeared.

The next minute I heard the sound of

steps, running down the stairs in the inside of the house, and a voice calling out—

“D——n you! What you doing dere? Let dat door alone. I teach you to come in here, you ole debil!”

But aunt Jenny was too quick for him. I heard the key turn in the lock; and, putting my shoulder to the door, I pushed it open, when a scene presented itself which would have made me laugh at any other time. My rheumatic friend from above, who had once been a tall and powerful man, had got aunt Jenny by the throat, and with the expression of a demon, seemed bent upon strangling her, while she, with not the sweetest expression either, was belabouring his head and face with the large key which she had withdrawn from the door as soon as she had unlocked it.

I soon settled the strife, however, by taking hold of the man's collar, and throwing him back to the farther end of the hall.

“Ha! ha!” cried aunt Jenny, laughing, yet panting from the struggle. “I know de way in. He not keep me here two months for nothing, arter missus die. Why, old Sambo, arn’t you ’shamed of yourself?”

“I’se an old man,” said the negro, again advancing towards me. “And I’se a nigger; but, I can tell you, mas’r, dere will be udders here very soon, not so old, not so black as I be.”

“Who may they be?” I asked, quietly.

“Why, mas’r Thornton,” answered the man; “and de udders who he left here, but who is just step out.”

“As to Mr. Thornton and his son,” I answered, “you are not likely to see them again for sometime; as they are both in prison for what they have done to-day. As to any others that Mr. Thornton left, I will settle with them when they come in again.”

“Prison!” ejaculated the man. “Prison! You don’t say mas’r Thornton in prison?”

“Yes,” I answered, assuming a very potential air; “and whether I send you to prison or not, will a good deal depend upon your behaviour. Go, take my horse to the stable, and give him some oats and hay.”

“Lor bless ’ee, mas’r, I got no oats and hay,” answered the man.

“Then give him some corn,” I replied, in a peremptory tone. “I shall come down presently, and see that he eats it. Be quick; do what I tell you. Return here quickly; for I want to speak more with you.”

The man seemed to hesitate for a moment; but negroes, unless they are greatly excited, are swayed by a commanding tone. After twice pausing on his way to the door, he went out, took the horse, and led it away towards the back of the house.

‘Now, Jenny,’ I said, “make the best of your time. Get some food; see who is in the lower part of the house, and come back and

join me speedily ; for I have got to search for Miss Bessy."

"Let's look for her first, mas'r Conway," answered Jenny, eagerly. "I get on now. Dat brandy make me quite streng."

"Let us search the lower part first," I replied.

Passing from room to room, through the dilapidated house, we came to the kitchen, or sort of out-house, where we found two old women, seated by a large open fire-place, and apparently concerning themselves but little as to what took place in their neighbourhood. They seemed indeed withered up, and hardened by neglect and solitude, and hardly took any notice of us, except looking over their shoulders, till I ordered one of them to get some food for my companion, when she mechanically rose, and, opening a cupboard fixed to the wall, produced some salt-fish and coarse bread.

Jenny, however, was too eager in pursuit of

her young lady, to waste her time in eating ; and, taking some of the food in her hand, she followed me up the creaking stairs to a large window at the top, on the sill of which, old Samuel had apparently been seated when we arrived. The house was not a very large one, and the doors of several of the rooms were open, showing a scene of utter desolation within ; but as darkness increased every moment, I thought it better to try what effect my voice would have in discovering whether Bessy was there or not ; and I called as loudly as I could—

“ Bessy, dear Bessy, are you here ?”

“ Here ! here !” answered a voice from the end of the corridor.

Springing forward, I found a door, locked, but without the key in it.

“ Are you there ?” ejaculated I.

“ Yes, yes,” answered that sweet, never-to-be-forgotten voice. “ Is that you, dear Richard ?”

“Stand back from the door, love, and I will drive it in,” I exclaimed.

And putting my foot against the balustrade of the stairs, and my shoulder against the old, dilapidated door, I speedily forced the lock from the wood-work, and fell almost head-long into the room.

The windows looked to the eastward, so that it was darker within than without; and I could just see a woman's figure at the other side near the windows. But Bessy saw *me* better; and in another moment she was in my arms, and weeping on my bosom. I am afraid I kissed her very often, and very freely; but, in that moment, all restraint was broken down. She and I both felt that she was mine; and her lips answered mine, I am sure of it.

Old Jenny hugged her in turn, though she was very discreet not to interrupt us too soon. But there was no time to be lost; and as soon as we had somewhat recovered ourselves, I said—

“Now, dearest Bessy, what is to be done? You know the state of affairs here better than we do. Robert Thornton and his father have been apprehended by the sheriff, and I find only one old negro-man here and two women. Is it safe to stay here till to-morrow morning?”

“There is another younger, man, somewhere about,” she answered; “but I should think they would not venture upon any violence, especially when they know their masters are in prison. Besides, you are well armed, are not you?”

“I have this double-barrelled gun and one pistol,” I replied. “You had one, love, and Jenny here, had one.”

“Ah, dey took mine from me,” cried Jenny, who was munching away as hard as she could at the handful of bread and herring she had brought from the kitchen; “dey got dat from me, ’fore I knew what dey was doing.”

“I have got the one you gave me, safe,”

said Bessy; "and, indeed, to have it was a great comfort to me; for I did not know what might happen next; and I am afraid I felt as if I could have shot any of them."

"I tell you what to do," cried Jenny; "better not stop here. We are in Nort Carolina here. Let's get back, just to de State line. In Virginy we shall be safer, and know what we are doing."

"But my good woman," I answered, "this dear girl can't remain in the Swamp all night; and if we were to try to get back to the sheriff's plantation, a thousand to one, we should be lost in the night, and she might perish."

"Ay, ay," answered the old girl, with a conceited nod of her head. "Leave all dat to aunt Jenny. Why, dere dat nice cabin, Habakkuk built for hisself just upon de line, arter Miss Bab's death.—Don't you know, Missie Bessy? All of felled logs. There you be quite comferable, and I cook for you."

“But where will you get anything to cook, Jenny?” asked Bessy, with a laugh. “I have fared but poorly since I have been here.”

“Oh, I see plenty in de kitchen,” said Jenny. “I look about me—two or tree dozen eggs, and butter, and tree gallon loaves. We take what we can find. If dey carry us away, dey must feed us. When once we are dere we are quite safe; for dere be two good large room; and dey could never get old Habakkuk out.”

After some consultation with Bessy, I judged that it was better to follow the old woman’s advice. We could not tell how many of Mr. William Thornton’s people were near us. We had no reason to believe that our good friend, the sheriff, would venture to come over the Virginian line to our assistance; and it was quite possible that Mr. Thornton and his son might get bail that night, and be upon us early on the following morning. It was evident, too, that they had already gone so far in a

daring and lawless course, that no slight considerations would stop them ; and in that old and dilapidated house, which seemed to have only two rooms tenantable, there was no possibility of making a good defence against violence from superior numbers. I believe Bessy's evident anxiety to get away from the place as speedily as possible, contributed not a little to fix my determination ; and it was at length settled that, after allowing a little time for my horse to feed, we should set out for the hut which Jenny mentioned, and to which she professed to know the way perfectly, night or day.

Before we came fully to this determination, we heard the voice of the old negro speaking to the woman below ; and he twice came to the foot of the stairs with a lighted pine-knot in his hand, and looked up ; but he immediately retreated to the kitchen.

As soon as our resolution was taken, I unslung the gun from my shoulders, and leading

the way down, proceeded at once to the kitchen, to carry the war, if war it must be, into the enemy's territory. I thought it very likely that the party might, by this time, be reinforced; but I was mistaken. No one was there but the old man and the two old women, and they seemed inclined to be more civil. They all moved out of the way as we advanced towards the fire-place, of which, although it was a very warm night, I made my little party take possession, as a good strategic position; and, knowing the advantage of acting on the offensive, I said to the old man—

“How dare you to be art and part in depriving a free white young lady of her liberty?”

I then told him I had a great mind to tie his hands behind his back, and carry him into Virginia.

“I am told there is another man here,” I added; “where is he? Call him up to me. I am determined to punish you all.”

“He not here, mas'r,” said the old man, in a subdued tone. “He am gone over to see what de row over dere. Dey tell him, him cousin shot. I only do what I’s'e told. It’s mas'r’s fault, not mine. He tell me keep Miss Bessy here, and not let her see nobody, no account whatebber. What can I do, poor nigger man?”

“Your master cannot make you do an illegal thing,” I answered. “But come, bring out whatever you have got to eat; we are all hungry.”

“I see arter that,” cried aunt Jenny, who seemed quite at home in the kitchen. “Now, Venus, where you put de milk?”

Venus, who was as unlike her Grecian namesake as could well be conceived, declared the cows were not milked; adding—

“That black nigger Jack had gone away across de Swamp and forget 'em.”

But Jenny, who could play termagant when

the occasion required it, drove out the old man to milk the cows himself.

Our meal was certainly unwillingly given; but the grudging did not detract from its savour to very hungry people; and I must say, we made perfectly free with Mr. Thornton's house, without any remorse of conscience.

After we had supped, aunt Jenny gathered together whatever she could find of an edible quality, helped herself to a basket, and piled upon the top, besides a candle or two, a number of knotty pitch-pine pieces, which often, in this part of the country, served the purpose of torches.

"Now, come along, Sam'l," she said; "I'se not going to let you 'bide here, plotting. I hope you fed de horses well, for we'se a long way to go, to-night, and 'praps mayn't get to de sheriff's 'afore to-morrow morning. Dat's why I'm taking all these purvisions; and if Mas'r Thornton say I stole 'em, you tell 'im

Sir Richard Conway will pay for 'em when he send in his bill."

The old man grumbled; but she drove him out before us, to the stable, where we found my own horse, and that which had carried Bessy thither. There was also a mule in the stable, which I had a strong inclination to borrow, for the purpose of mounting old Jenny; but the good woman declined the honor, saying, she had rather walk; she didn't like "'orseback," it made her "uncomfortable."

With some little trouble, we got everything in order, and set out; the moon, though not yet above the trees, afforded us light sufficient. We went very slowly, and more than once I turned my head to make sure that the old negro was not following to watch us. Jenny seemed to divine my suspicion, and, at length, said, with a laugh—

"Don't you be afraid, mas'r. He'll not come after we. He's a lazy old debbil, as

cross as two sticks; but he would not walk ten steps to save his own soul, if he could help it. I know him long time, and was two months in de house wid him. Oh! and he tell such big lies too. He go and say to Mas'r Thornton, you came wid ten men and took away Miss Bessy, and he couldn't help it;—and he'll give all their names too, jist as if he see 'em wid his own eyes."

"Those are lies which can do us no possible harm, Jenny," I answered; "for if these two Thorntons were by any chance to get bailed out to-night, they would not like to pursue us, if they thought we had a large party."

Bessy was very silent as we rode along, and doubtless was tired and exhausted; but we had good reason to thank heaven for the hardy education she had received from aunt Bab; for one half of what she had gone through during the last two days would have killed any ordinary Virginia girl.

After having ridden on for about twenty

minutes, we passed a very large tree standing nearly alone, and aunt Jenny said in an oracular tone—

“Nort Carolina line. Now we’s in Virginy. Tank God for dat !

Here she turned away to the left, keeping, I supposed, along the boundary line of the two states; and, in little more than a quarter of an hour, we came to an open space just upon the edge of the Swampland, where, though the moon had now risen, and I looked round on every side, I could perceive nothing at all like the cabin she had mentioned. She trudged on sturdily, however, for a hundred yards farther, and then turned round the edge of a little clump of bushes which had hitherto concealed, completely, a low hut, formed of logs, roughly hewn square with the axe, and placed, one upon the top of the other, to form the walls. It seemed well thatched with branches and reeds, and had two windows, or rather apertures, and a door, giving it somewhat the

appearance of the houses made out of a cat's head, which we draw to amuse children.

"Ah! here it is!" cried aunt Jenny, "Dis is de place, mas'r, where ole Habakkuk live for a long time, 'cause he would not be under Mas'r Thornton, when ole missus die. Mas'r Thornton could never find him out; and we, none of us, never say a word. De ole man build it all himself wid his own hands. A mighty smart man he were, and made himself quite comferable here. I guess his ole bedstead here still; so dat you and Miss Bessie can lie down and rest."

By this time we had arrived at the door—and Jenny was about to open it, when I suggested that it might be better to have some light before we went in, if she had the means of procuring any.

"Oh dear, yes," said Jenny. "I brought away de flint and steel. You give me drop of gunpowder, mas'r, on de wick of dis candle, and we'll soon have light."

I did as she desired ; and, after lifting Bessy from her horse, I took the candle, which by this time was lighted, and went into the cabin. I must say it had a much less desolate appearance than the house of Mr. Thornton. The old man who constructed it must have had no little skill, taste, and perseverance. He had divided it into two rooms ; patched up all the crevices between the logs with moss and mud ; formed two shutters for the windows, and a tight-fitting door ; and had, apparently with his own hands, constructed from the branches of the trees and the fallen logs in the neighbourhood, four seats and a table in the outer room, and a bedstead somewhat in the shape of a knife-tray, in the inner one.

Though so near the Swamp, there was no appearance of damp about the hut ; and I heartily rejoiced, notwithstanding all its roughness, that Bessy would have such a place of shelter for the night.

She and aunt Jenny had, by this time, fol-

lowed me in ; and, seating the dear girl in one of the rude chairs, I pushed back the hair from her forehead, gazing in her face to see what change all the fatigues and annoyances she had undergone had made in her. She looked pale and fatigued certainly, but not ill ; and comprehending my anxiety, she took my hand gently in hers, saying—

“ Oh, I shall do very well, dear Richard. A few days' rest and quiet is all I want ; and then I shall be as well and saucy again as ever. But you had better look to the horses for fear they should run away.”

They had had too much work lately for that, and were still standing with drooping heads at the door of the hut when I went out. Taking off the saddles and bridles, I easily contrived to hamper their feet with the stirrup-leathers ; and then, leaving them to provide for themselves during the night, I returned into the cabin and closed the door. It had, unfortunately, no lock, bolt, or bar ; but I had already

made up my mind to sit up and watch, so that the want of fastenings did not so much matter.

In the meantime, aunt Jenny had been bustling about, and had really given an air of some comfort to the place. She had gathered some fragments of wood which lay about the door; had lighted a little fire on the broad, flat stone which served for a hearth; had fixed the candle into a hole in the table which had previously served for a candlestick; and had fastened one of the pine-knots against the wall, adding more light to the interior, though accompanied by a strong, but, to my mind, aromatic smell, from the burning of the resin.

Seating myself beside Bessy, I took her hand in mine, saying—

“One more night, dearest, one more uncomfortable night, and then I trust all our troublous hours will have passed, and the memories of them will be but like a distressing dream. Had you not better go and lie down to

obtain some sleep? We can easily get some leaves and dry reeds to make up a tolerable couch."

"You had better, Missie Bessy," said old Jenny. "Dere going to be storm to-night. Better get asleep before de tunder comes, and den you sleep it troo."

"You go and sleep with her, Jenny," I said. "You must be tired out too, poor woman! I will stay here and watch till morning. Then I will wake you, and you shall get us some breakfast before we set out."

"Indeed I am not the least sleepy," said Bessy, with a smile. "Do you know, Richard, so dull and insensible have I been—or perhaps I should say, so benumbed by all that has occurred—that this morning after they brought me to that old house, and I found I could not get out, I fell sound asleep, and must have been still asleep when you arrived. I will sit up and watch with you for an hour or two ;

but Jenny had better go and sleep; for I am sure she must need it."

"Well, 'praps I do," answered the good woman. "Then you call me by and by, and come and sleep yourself, my darling; but let's set off, whatsoever, by daylight."

Jenny was somewhat more particular in regard to her bed than most people of her colour. Going forth to the edge of the Swamp once or twice, she brought in several bundles of dry rushes, shaking her head each time she returned, and saying—

"Goin, to storm very soon. Great a'mighty big clouds coming up—hope de water not come in."

At length, all her preparations were complete; and retiring into the little inner cell with a lighted pine-knot in her hand, she closed the door between, and left Bessy and myself alone.

I drew my chair close to her, and I think I might be forgiven for putting my arm round

her and making her pillow her head upon my bosom as she had done two nights before. I might also be forgiven for pressing my lips upon hers, and drawing her somewhat closely to my heart. At least *she* forgave me, and that was all I cared about.

I told her how anxious I had been, how terrified, when I found she was gone from the spot in which I had left her—what a night and day of agitation and alarm I had undergone—and how I longed to hear all that had befallen her from her own sweet lips.

“Oh I will tell you all,” said Bessy. “I wish I could call it a ‘Mid-Summer Night’s Dream,’ dear Richard; but it has been too terribly real for that. However, it will wile away half-an-hour of the night; and so you shall hear it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

BESSY'S NARRATIVE.

You remember, when you left me, I promised, if anything should make me quit the spot, to strew some pieces of paper or fragments of my handkerchief upon the ground as I went, to give you some indication of the way I had taken. For about a quarter of an hour—it could not be more (though it seemed to me more at the time)—all was quiet and still; and I and Jenny and the girl, Minerva, sat and talked, listening every now and then for your

return. At length one of the other mulatto women came from the place where they had lighted a fire, to say that their cooking was ready ; and, seeing me and Jenny, asked us to come and partake. We declined, however ; and Minerva went away and left us.

But a minute or two had passed, when we heard a distant noise of horses' feet ; and then the sound of people talking loud not far off. I started up and prepared to fly, but Jenny's sharp ears had distinguished the voices better than I had, and she said—

“ Those are white men's tongues !”

I listened, and convinced myself she was right ; and after a good deal of conversation had gone on, apparently between the new comers and the mulatto women, we saw seven or eight white men coming up, guided by the girl Minerva. They were headed by a person whom I knew, though I cannot say I ever much liked him, and would rather perhaps have had any other escort. On this occasion,

however, he behaved quietly, and like a gentleman, telling me that his party would convey me to a place of safety ; that they had several spare horses with them and women's saddles ; but that, as it was growing late, it would be necessary for me to come with him directly.

I informed him, in return, that you had gone to see if the way were clear to Jerusalem, and that I did not think I ought to go, till you came back. He said he could not wait that time, as he had several other young ladies to take up at different houses on the road ; but that he must insist upon my not remaining there exposed to danger from any of the lawless ruffians who were roaming about ; at the same time, to satisfy me that you would have information of my departure and safety he said he would leave one or two of his men on the spot. I heard him give the order myself, and I do believe he was at this time acting in good faith, though he did not behave rightly afterwards.

If I acted wrongly, dear Richard, forgive me; though I have hardly forgiven myself since, knowing and feeling what you must have suffered. Is not that a vain speech, Richard? But you see how I count upon your love, and I don't mind your seeing it.

Well, I was satisfied that you would soon know, and your mind be put at ease; and I and Jenny went with Colonel Halliday and his party to the path on the right, where we found all the horses and half-a-dozen more men. Once there, we were mounted immediately; but the men continued on foot talking together for some minutes, arguing, it seemed to me, upon some arrangements. At length they jumped on their horses; and Halliday, and five of the men, rode off in one direction while the rest pushed to the right, taking me and Jenny with them.

We had not gone a quarter of a mile, when who should ride up to my side from behind, but old William Thornton, Robert's father.

“Well, cousin Bessy,” he said, “we will take good care of you. We will put you in a place of safety. What a lucky thing, you escaped out of Beavors! Why they have murdered all the rest.”

“I understood Colonel Halliday, he was going to take me to Jerusalem;” I replied; “and this is quite a contrary direction, Mr. Thornton.”

“Oh, you mistook him,” replied the old man; “you can’t get to Jerusalem nor he either. The road is in possession of the niggers. There’s full four hundred of em.”

At first, Richard, I was frightened, and thought of you, and how you would get through. But the next moment, something in my own breast, told me the statement was all false. I knew the man. I knew what a knave he was, and what efforts he had made to get me into his hands when I was a child; then a selfish fear, a fear for myself took possession of me. I was now in his power. I

doubted not the people who were with him were all his own creatures; and, after a minute or two of wild consideration, confused and inconsequent enough, I thought it would be best to let him take me where he would, believing that in this country of law, he dare not use any violence or do me any injury. At all events, I had got the pistol you had given me, and at that moment, I looked upon it as a treasure indeed.

Well, he carried me to his own house, and took me there to a nice room enough, where he said he would send me up some supper. He was exceedingly polite and civil all the time, and excused himself for not taking me into the parlour, because his son Robert was there, who was not quite recovered.

Presently a negro girl brought me some lights; for by this time it was quite dark. Then came some supper, and some wine, of which I partook heartily, I confess; for I was weak and faint, and I felt the necessity of some

adventitious courage. My supper was hardly over when William Thornton and his son both came in. The old man carried some papers in his hand; and the son, after speaking a few civil words, sat himself down right between me and the door.

“Well, cousin Bessy,” said the father, “I dare say, after all your fatigue and fright, you will sleep well to-night. You are quite safe here; for we have got three white men in the house, Irishmen, who will shoot down any one I order them to destroy; so you need not be in the least alarmed.”

“I am not alarmed at all,” I answered—though I am afraid, Richard, it was a great fib. “Don’t you know, Mr. Thornton, it takes a great deal to alarm me?”

The old man looked a little confounded at my reply; but he said—

“Well, well, we will soon leave you to go to sleep; only there are some old accounts and things between you and me, cousin Bessy,

in regard to matters that occurred when I had the management of your property, which I think we had better settle now. I only just want you to sign these receipts, and acquittances. They are all right, as you can see. Give me down the ink ; here's a pen."

Robert Thornton brought the ink from the mantel-piece, and his father put the papers before me. I did not pay much attention to them ; but I just caught in one part, some words which I think were, "For, and in consideration, of the sum of thirty thousand dollars, the receipt of which is hereby acknowledged."

I pushed them away at once to the other side of the table, saying—

"Mr. Thornton, I will sign no papers whatever except in the presence of Mr. Hubbard, and Mr. Henry Thornton ; and if these papers are fair and right, I cannot understand your pressing them upon me at such a moment, and in such circumstances."

“The reason of their being pressed upon you Miss Davenport,” said Robert Thornton with one of his cold sneers, “and the reason why I shall insist upon their being signed at once, lies in the very circumstances to which you do not choose to allude; namely, that you are about to be married to a man whose father deprived you of your father, and who himself nearly deprived me of life. Unless these are signed before your marriage, difficulties must and will arise which I am determined—”

“Stay, stay, Bessy!” I cried, interrupting her narrative; “let me hear that again.”

“Not now, Richard, not now,” she said eagerly. “He alluded to your father, Sir Richard Conway; but the very allusion drove me half wild; and I am afraid that I showed myself such a dragon that you would never wish to marry me, if you had seen me then.”

I took up the papers, and tore them into a thousand pieces, and then said, with as big a

look as I could put on—I can hardly think of it without smiling—“Leave the room, sirs! and do not venture to come back again!”

The old man got up and drew back; but the younger kept his chair, saying, coldly—

“The papers are soon re-written; and, though sorry to prevent you from sleeping, we shall bring them back in about a quarter of an hour.”

“Then mark me, Mr. Robert Thornton,” I answered, taking out the pistol; “the first man who attempts to intrude into this room again, I will shoot before his foot crosses the threshold, and these fragments will show the reason why. Leave the room, sirs, instantly.”

They *did* leave the room—the elder gentleman with a considerable degree of trepidation. But, my dear Richard, I was a mere bully all the time; and although, I am sure, I looked twice as tall as I really am, and talked twice as loud as I ever did in my life before, I was frightened out of my wits all the time. The next

unpleasant thing was to hear them lock the door; but, thank Heaven, there was a great bolt in the inside; and if they kept *me* in, I was determined to keep *them* out, or I believed that help must come soon, as too many people knew that I was there, for concealment to be long kept up.

I need not tell you all the little incidents of that night. I would let nobody into the room but the servant-girl, and made quite sure that only one step had come up the stairs, before I would open the door to her.

But the discomforts of that evening were nothing to the horrors of the next morning. What the hour was, I do not know; for my watch was left behind at poor Mr. Stringer's; but I suppose it must have been about nine or ten o'clock; when, seated behind the blind at the open window, I saw five or six negro-men coming up towards the house. When they came near, I recognised several of them at once

as poor aunt Bab's servants, and I saw a great, tall man, whom I knew very well, come forward and knock at the door, after which he retreated five or six steps from the house; and I heard old William Thornton's voice speaking to him out of a window on the same floor as the room in which I was.

"Go away, go away this instant," cried the old man; "go away, or I'll shoot you. Not one of you ruffians shall get into my house. Here, Pat Macrea, bring me my gun, and get your own. Bob, Bob," he continued, calling across the passage; "here are a whole heap of the Beavors niggers come to rescue her."

"Fire into them—fire into them!" cried my worthy cousin Robert, with an oath. "You can say you thought they came to attack the house. I'll be with you in a minute."

You may judge how terrified I was, Richard; but putting my head out, I saw old Mr. Thornton and one of his Irishmen leaning

forth from two of the windows with guns in their hands. Just at the same moment, poor Hercules exclaimed—

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t shoot us, Mas’r Thornton! We only want to speak with Miss Bessy.”

“Go along!” cried the old man. “She’s not here, I tell you.”

“Why I see her there now,” cried the negro.

At the same moment, Robert Thornton came to the window, crying—

“March off, you scoundrels!” Then, adding something in a low voice to his father, he put a gun to his shoulder.

“For shame, Mr. Thornton—for shame!” I cried, as loud as I could speak.

But it had no effect. All the guns went off almost together, and three of the poor negroes fell. Two started up again immediately; but poor Hercules remained upon the ground till

the rest carried him off. I thought I should have fainted; and the dreadful deed they had done seemed to have awed and terrified the other people in the house. I heard them talking loudly and eagerly; and, from fragments of their conversation which I caught, I easily comprehended that what terrified them most was the fact of my having witnessed their proceedings.

“Oh, the old devil can do no harm,” said Robert Thornton. “She’s a nigger and a slave, and can’t testify. As to this girl you must send her across the line, and keep her there till the matter is settled. The court sits next Thursday week.”

“But how shall we get her to go?” asked old Mr. Thornton.

“I will make her go, or serve her the same,” said Robert Thornton, bitterly. “Here, Pat,” continued he, “you and Dan won’t be afraid to follow me into the girl’s room, though

she has got a pistol. I will go in first, and she can but shoot one of us."

"Afraid! not a bit," answered the man. "We'll soon master her, whatever devil there may be in her. But you won't hurt her, Master Thornton; I can't see a woman hurt."

All this conversation was carried on very close to my door; and I will own, Richard, I was completely cowed.

"Mr. Thornton," I cried, "Mr. Thornton—speak to me through the door. I know what you are afraid of, and what you want; and I am willing to go peaceably where you wish me; for I do not want to have a cousin's blood upon my head."

"Well, undraw the bolt then," said Robert Thornton, "and let us come in."

"No, no," I answered, "I will make my conditions. Nobody shall come in, and nobody shall touch me. Bring the horses round before the house, and I will come down the stairs quietly and mount, if you will promise that

nobody shall come within two yards of me. Do you all promise?"

"Yes," answered Robert Thornton, "nobody wants to come near you, Miss Bessy, or to do you any harm."

"Very well," I answered; "I will trust to your promise. But mind, if any one comes near, I will shoot him as sure as my name is Davenport; and the consequences be upon your own heads. Now bring round the horses and keep away from the door."

Three horses were brought round almost immediately, and some one came and unlocked the door. I heard him go down stairs again, and then, opening the door, I went down with the pistol in my hand. I tried not to shake, Richard; and I don't think any of them saw how terrified I was; for I heard the old man say when I got out before the house—

"What a devil she is!" He little knew how my heart was sinking at that moment.

As I approached the side of the horse on which the woman's saddle had been

put, Robert Thornton offered to help me ; but I was still afraid he would get the pistol from me, and I told him to stand off.

Without farther parley, we set out as soon as I had mounted ; one negro man going on horseback before, and another following closely. None of the white men accompanied us ; but I heard old Mr. Thornton giving as strict directions to the man who followed, as if I were to be imprisoned for some criminal offence. He ended by saying—

“Now, mind, if she gets away, I will cut you to pieces ; so see to it.”

In this manner I was brought over to the house where you found me, and there locked in that miserable room, by the old man, Samuel, and another younger negro whom I have not seen since.

“And now, dear Richard,” said Bessy, having finished her story, “don’t you think me a terrible termagant ? When I think of all I

said and did, I feel almost ashamed of myself, and I dare say, hereafter, I shall blush whenever I think of it."

"Why, dearest Bessy," I answered, drawing her closer to me, "what could you do? The gentlest hearts are not always those most devoid of spirit."

"But have you not sometimes thought mine a cold heart, Richard?" asked Bessy; "so cold as to give you pain without cause. Oh, you know not when I have given you pain what agony I have inflicted on myself!"

Closer and closer I drew her to my bosom; kiss after kiss I pressed upon her lips, till she became almost frightened, and exclaimed—

"Oh, Richard, remember, nothing is changed!"

"Yes, dearest," I answered, "everything is changed. One little word you have spoken, insures that you shall never have need, or fancy you have need, to inflict pain upon me or yourself again."

I was going on; but such an awful clap of thunder burst over our heads, that she started from my arms like a guilty thing; and event after event came fast to stay farther explanation.

CHAPTER IX.

THERE was but a momentary pause. We had not, occupied as we had been with each other, seen the flash which preceded or accompanied the thunder ; but before I could persuade Bessy to sit down by me again, a blaze, gleaming through every crack and cranny of the hut, dazzled our eyes, succeeded by a peal, breaking just over head, as if mountains had fallen, which, echoed and re-echoed round by the forest, exceeded, in deafening roar, anything I had ever heard, even in the Indian ocean.

Then came the rushing sound of the descending rain, first pattering heavily on the thatch, and then sounding with one continuous noise, like that of a waterfall. The frail covering above us could not withstand the flood; and here and there the water began to drop on the floor, especially near the walls. The space around the table, indeed, remained free; but, fearing that our poor brown companion, in the adjoining room, might suffer before she was aware—for negroes will sleep through anything—I ventured to look in.

Jenny had heard no thunder; nor had the lightning passed before her eyes with any effect. She slept as soundly as if there was no war of elements, nor any other dangers nigh. But the thatch over that room had been more solidly constructed, and the rain had not penetrated.

Satisfied on that score, I returned to the other room, and again seated myself beside Bessy, placing my gun and a pistol on the

table, where I could see that they did not get wet.

I had not returned a moment too soon; for I had no time to utter a word, before the door of the hut was pushed sharply open, and a dark form presented itself at the aperture.

On the first impulse, I snatched up the gun, and, pointing it at the doorway, exclaimed—"Stand!" while Bessy cowered down in her chair with a look of terror, but did not speak or move from her seat.

"Stand!" I exclaimed again, seeing the man take a step forward, "Stand, or I fire! What do you want?"

"Shelter—food," answered the negro. "Fire, if you like! It matters little."

As he spoke, I perceived by the dim light that the intruder was the leader of the sanguinary band, who had crushed out so many a happy hearth, and made so many a household desolate.

"Keep back for a moment," he said, turning

to some one without. Then, confronting me again, he added, "I am starving, and so are those with me. God's storms are raging through the forest. Will you give me some food? Will you allow me and mine to take shelter here till the deluge has passed over? On my life, no harm shall happen to you. If not, fire; and you will find you have killed the only one who could protect you."

"Will you swear by the God whom you adore, and Who you fancy has guided you," I asked, "that neither you nor your companions will offer any violence; and that you will quit the hut the moment the storm is ended—nay, that you will not move forward from that side of the cabin while you are here?"

"I swear!" he answered. "But you, too, must promise that you will not betray me."

I thought for an instant; but the consideration of Bessy's safety prevailed over every other, and I promised.

“Who is in the other room?” he asked, seeing a light gleaming through a chink in the door.

“Only one other person,” I answered, “who is under my command. You are quite secure if you keep your oath. If you do not, I have three lives, at least, at my disposal.”

“I have sworn by the Almighty,” said the man, in a tone almost of indignation. Then, turning to the door again, he exclaimed, “Come in!”

Two other negroes instantly appeared from behind him; and as all three were armed, the odds against me, in case of strife, were somewhat serious. I had trusted, however, to my own conception of the man's character; for, although every sort of abuse had been piled upon him by all ranks and classes in the county-town, and though certainly his deeds, during the last days, had been of the most remorseless and brutal nature, yet I had come

to a conclusion which nothing could shake, that superstitious fanaticism was at the bottom of all his actions, good and evil.

Nor had I any cause to change my opinion from his conduct towards me. He pledged himself by the being whom he madly believed to be his prompter and guide in all his wickedness; and I rightly believed he would keep his word. He himself and both his companions looked gaunt, exhausted, and famished; and I am convinced that had I refused them the boon of food and shelter which they required in their desperate condition, they would not only have taken it, but the lives of all within the hut.

“There, in that basket, is the only food I have to give you,” I said. “Take it and share it amongst you. We have not been well supplied ourselves; but you want it more than we do.”

One of the men was starting forward to seize

the basket; but Nat Turner put him sternly back, saying—

“I have promised that you should not go a step forward from that side of the cabin. By your permission, sir, I will take the food, for we do want it indeed.”

“Leave us some, leave us some,” cried a voice behind me; and, turning round, I beheld old Jenny, who, though she had slept through the thunder, had woke up, it would seem, at the sound of human voices.”

“I was well nigh starved to death to-day by that old Thornton, and I don't want to die o' hunger to-morrow, nor see you nor Missie Bessy either, Mas'r Conway.”

A grim sort of smile came over Nat Turner's dark countenance as he threw the pine-knots out of the basket on the floor, and helped his companions with his own hands to the coarse bread and raw salt fish which lay beneath. He took a small portion himself

also, but less than he gave them; and, looking first at me, and then at Bessy, he said—

“You have found, I fancy, that white men can be as hard and cruel as negroes—but without the same cause.”

As he spoke, he rolled his eyes in his head with a fierce, almost insane look; and then added abruptly—

“This cabin was built by an old negro as a place of refuge from the brutality of one of your white men. We break forth for a moment when we can bear no longer, destroy, kill, murder, if you like; but has any one of us inflicted as much misery, done as much harm, as that man in the course of his long life? If we had done rightly, he would have been the first sacrifice to the God of vengeance. We should have chosen our victims equitably; and perhaps it is for this that the Almighty favour is withdrawn from us; but the time may come when it will be restored.”

“Ah, Nat, Nat,” said Jenny, “I did not

think you would have done such terrible things as you have done—you, who always seemed kind and good, and to be a God-fearing man.”

“Woman, I did God’s bidding!” answered Nat Turner, with a sharp, angry look; “and I will do it still, but more wisely.”

He then fell into a fit of deep thought, fixing his eyes upon the floor, and remaining on his feet, though his two companions had seated themselves on the ground.

Every two or three minutes the lightning continued to flash, and the thunder to roar, and the rain still poured down in torrents.

“I wish, dearest Bessy,” I said, in a low voice, “you would go into the other room and rest. This man will keep his word with us. There is no danger.”

“I will stay by your side, Richard,” she answered in a whisper; “this is my place.”

A long pause ensued; and certainly curious sensations arose—sensations not very pleasant,

when I reflected that before me were three men whose hands, within the last eight-and-forty hours, had been steeped in the blood of nearly eighty human beings, most of them women and children."

At length, Nat Turner broke silence, saying abruptly, and in a gloomy tone—

"What was that you told me I saw about the sign in the sun—an eclipse you called it?"

I gave him the same explanation I had done before, telling him that it was a mere natural phenomenon, which occurred at periods easy to be calculated, in consequence of the regular movements of the planets.

"Can I have been mistaken?" he muttered between his teeth. "No, no!" he added in a louder tone; "the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord! It was the sign, it was the sign! The vision and the prophecy cannot be mistaken. I saw him stand on my right side with a rod in his hand, and

he pointed to the sky, and he told me to be up and doing. It shall be fulfilled even yet. But the wheat must first be winnowed from the chaff, and the tares rooted out, that it be the work of the husbandman. What though there be few left, others shall rise up. Hands more meet, hearts more firm, to do the mighty and terrible work of the Lord."

His two companions fixed their eyes on his face, evidently regarding him as one inspired; and I watched with no slight anxiety, knowing well that one can never calculate what turn superstition may take. But he fell quietly into another reverie, which lasted nearly half-an hour; and his mood seemed to be soothed by his own reflections. I fancy the truth was, that irritating doubts had suggested themselves as to the truth of his fancied revelations; but that now, by his own arguments, he had satisfied his own mind again, and that his heart felt lighter in consequence.

The storm, though very severe, was brief. Before Nat Turner brought his meditations to a close, the thunder grew fainter, and followed, at a long distance, the flash of the lightning. The rain no longer pattered on the thatch; and the negro, looking up, said, though in what connection, I could not discover—

“Was not the moon very red when she rose to-night?”

“She was red enough last night,” answered aunt Jenny; “and I dare say she was redder to-night. But I did not look at she, Nat. She was as red as blood last night ’bout this time.”

“Ay, ay!” replied the man in a satisfied tone. Then, after a few minutes’ silence, he added—“It has done raining, I think, and I will keep my word.”

He opened the door of the hut and looked out; and we could see gleams of the moon’s light flitting over the Swamp as she struggled

with the parting clouds. After gazing forth, for a minute or two, he returned, and approached the side of the table, saying—

“I want you to give me some gun-powder, Sir Richard Conway. Mine is almost out.”

“Not if it were to save my life, and all that is most dear to me,” I answered. “Not one grain. I have given you food and shelter, but I will not give you the means to injure others.”

“So be it,” he replied, quietly. “God, mayhap, will give what you refuse.”

And calmly throwing the damp powder out of the pans of his guns, which had nothing but flint-locks, he primed the weapons again, and made his two companions bring their guns to him to undergo the same process. He then shook the flask at his ear, saying—

“One more charge a-piece, and before that is out, we must find more. Now, boys, leave the cabin.” They seemed to obey his lightest

word; and when they were gone, he turned to me, saying—"I do not thank you, for I have as much right here as you have, as much right possibly to the food. But I will keep my word with you--I will keep my vow and more. You may sleep in quiet and peace. I shall be near, and no one shall molest you. Good-night! We may meet again, when I shall not ask you for anything, or you refuse me."

And he left the cabin, drawing to the door after him.

CHAPTER X.

“Now, dearest Bessy,” I said, as soon as the man was gone, “you had better go into the other room and lie down to rest. Take Jenny with you, and I will remain here. That man will keep his word with us, depend upon it; and we shall see no more of them. But, as a precaution, I will push this table against the door, so that no one can take us by surprise.”

“But you want sleep yourself, Richard,” she said.

“ I will get some in this corner where it is dry,” I answered.

And, after some persuasion, she left me.

Did I sleep? Oh, no. Not only the necessity of watching to guard against any intrusion, kept me awake; but I had pleasant—nay joyful—thoughts to dwell upon. I had discovered a secret, at least, I thought so—upon which all my future happiness depended; and the happy reveries which followed might well occupy the two or three hours which remained of night.

At the end of that time, I could perceive a faint greyish light, glimmering through the chinks of the rude shutters; and I thought I might as well reconnoitre the ground without. I did not feel sure that the negroes had quitted the neighbourhood; and, though I was inclined to believe that, after what had passed, they would offer us no violence, even if we encountered them; yet there is so much uncertainty and even treachery in the character of

all barbarous people that ever I have seen, that I did not like to risk taking Bessy from the shelter of the hut, till I was sure the man had gone.

Partly removing the shutter, so as to leave perhaps half a hand's breadth for sight, I gazed out upon the wild and desolate scene presented by the Swamp, which looked more wild and desolate than ever, in that dull and unconfirmed light. All was still and quiet; and no moving object met my eye for a moment or two, till I saw the grass agitated slightly, not a couple of steps from the front of the hut. An instant after, a huge rattlesnake dragged himself sluggishly out of the long, dry grass, and crawled lazily towards a little knoll where the light fell most strongly. He seemed as if he were going out to take his morning's walk before his human enemies came abroad.

The next instant, I beheld one of those beautiful creatures called the king-snake, not half the size of the other, dash out in his

checkered coat of jet-black and ivory-white, and dart at the great sluggish reptile. A desperate fight ensued. They coiled one with the other; they bit, they struck at each other with their heads; and I could hardly imagine that the great rattle-snake could not easily destroy his little antagonist.

But I was mistaken. At the end of three minutes, the rattle-snake lay writhing on the ground in the agonies of death, and the king-snake, apparently uninjured, glided round and round several times, evidently calculating whether there was any possibility of swallowing him. That was impossible, however, from the relative size of the two creatures; and, contented with his victory, the brilliant little conqueror glided away.

“How happy it would be,” I thought, if, in the world of human life, the reptiles thus destroyed each other—ay, and so they do sometimes.” I knew not how soon I should see my fancy verified.

While I was thus pondering, I thought I heard a faint and distant sound, but it seemed to me as if, mingled in the noise, were tones of the human voice, and the footfalls of several horses.

Before the hut, as I have said, and hiding it, but only partially hiding it, as I found afterwards, from one of the paths across the Swamp, was a clump of bushes with a tall, pyramidal cedar or two rising up in the midst. I dare say, in the confusion of objects, the trees, the bushes, the green and yellow leaves, the fallen trunks, cast in every wild variety of attitude, the plashy ground, and, here and there, a higher piece of sandy bank with grey and yellow surfaces, thousands of people might pass along that way without a suspicion that any cabin was near. Still it was not fully concealed; and, afterwards, when I passed along that very path, knowing where it lay, I could clearly distinguish the lines of the little gable with its thatch.

I listened eagerly, and the sounds grew more and more distinct—horses' feet beating hard and fast, and people talking. A minute after, I could discern the party through the branches—three white men on horseback, and a stout young negro. They were hidden again; but, in another moment, I saw them more distinctly, and I recognized Robert Thornton and his father. The other white man's appearance was somewhat familiar to me, but I could not remember where I had seen him before. It was that of the man, Matthew Leary, who had accompanied Robert Thornton when first I encountered him, and whom Billy Byles had described, "as a man who would sell his own father," if he could find any man to buy him.

They passed on behind the clump of bushes, right in front; and, thinking them gone, I was turning to wake Bessy in order that we might find the horses which I could perceive

nowhere in the neighbourhood, and then proceed across the Swamp as fast as possible.

Suddenly, however, I was stopped by the sound of voices again quite near. I put my eye to the chink, which I had nearly closed; and, somewhat to my consternation, beheld the whole party before the hut.

“Why, I told you so,” cried old Mr. Thornton. “It is a cabin by ——. Who the devil built it here, I wonder?”

“Well, come along, come along father,” cried Robert Thornton, in an impatient and even angry tone; “if you dawdle on in this way, we shall miss our mark entirely. You can come back and see all about this when we have got her off. I tell you, if they catch hold of her, and bring her back, we are ruined.”

He muttered something about an old fool and his tender father called somebody a d——d jackanapes. But the old man seemed habitu-

ally under the control of his worthy son, and he rode on in the end, though apparently very unwillingly.

As they passed onward, a negro drew partly out from amongst the bushes, with a gun in his hand, which he raised, for a moment to his shoulder, but then let it drop again, as if he doubted his distance or his aim. The next moment, he glided back quietly into the bushes, and disappeared entirely. I continued to watch for a minute or two; and once I thought I saw a dark face appear as if gazing out in the direction which Mr. Thornton's party had taken; but it was seen only for an instant; and I turned to think what had best be done.

The question became, what was the greatest risk? Mr. Thornton, I judged, was very likely to return as soon as he found that Bessy was liberated; but, whatever violence he might venture to indulge in towards the

comparatively unprotected negroes, I felt assured that he would hesitate a good deal before he would enter into a struggle which he knew must be carried to extremity with white people.

On the other hand, Nat Turner and his companions had bound themselves by no very extensive engagement. They had promised us security during that night; but they might well look upon the bond as extending no farther; and, moreover, the great moral power of responsibility, was taken from them. They had dared and incurred the utmost penalty that human laws could pronounce: no mercy shown towards us could atone for their past inconceivable guilt; no fresh murder, no fresh barbarity could add one iota to the punishment which they were certain of receiving in this world. If they were not watching for our coming forth, why did they remain hiding there in the bushes just opposite the hut? I

could not but suspect, also, that, hampered as I had left them, the horses could not have got out of sight without having been removed.

Added to these thoughts, came the considerations, that if we went out from the hut we could be attacked on any side, unaided by any or either party ; but that as long as we remained within it, I could defend the door with very little difficulty against a more numerous force than I had yet seen : and, in addition, I thought that it was more than probable the sheriff, when he found, on returning to his own house, that neither I nor Bessy had returned, would scour the country along the state-line, and, perhaps, even pass it in search of us.

Bessy still slept soundly, to all appearance ; and, at length, after much hesitation, I determined not to rouse her. I employed the time in sawing out, with the old saw which lay in the corner, several stout pins and bolts to fasten the door. For this purpose I took part of the table ; and, in a short time, I made

the entrance secure. The shutters of the windows ran in grooves, and the wood-work, both of them and of the door, was almost an inch-and-a-half thick; which, though penetrable by a musket-ball, was sufficient to deaden the shot greatly. There were no apertures at the back of the house: the square aperture, which served for a window, commanded the only approach; and, satisfied that my little castle was fortified as far as possible, I waited, watching to see if the negroes would quit the covert, though I had some apprehension that they might make their exit on the opposite side.

I had hardly resumed my post at the window a minute, when Bessy crept up to my side. The noise of the axe and the saw had awakened her; and I had to tell her all that had occurred, and to go over with her all the reasonings which induced me to remain where we were. She seemed to have an unquestioning faith in my decisions; and while I

tightly fastened up the window in the other room where she had been sleeping, she kept watch in the first room, never moving from the spot where I had placed her.

“Nothing has moved,” she said, as I rejoined her; “not a twig has quivered, not a rain-drop has fallen from a leaf.”

“Then probably the men remain there still,” I answered; “for I suspect they have horses with them, and the batch of bushes is too narrow for any large body to move out unperceived.”

“I do not think,” observed Bessy, after meditating for a moment or two, “that there is any fear of violence from Mr. Thornton or his party. Robert is a coward, I am sure. He may bolster himself up to some degree of determination when he is forced to it by fear of the world; and he may do terrible and cruel acts where poor negroes or women are concerned. But he is always more or less cowed, as I have seen, when he opposed to a

free man, and more especially to a gentleman. He does not seem to know how to act; and, in his hesitation, he gets alarmed.”

“I agree with you,” I replied; “for although in the unfortunate affair between himself and me, he did not actually show want of nerve, I could plainly perceive he would a great deal rather have avoided fighting, had it been possible. But see! there is something moving in the bushes.”

It certainly was so; and the movement was towards the side at which we were standing; but nobody issued forth; and after waiting for a few minutes more, sharing in my watch, Bessy left me to call old Jenny, who had slept uninterruptedly through all that had taken place.

The good old cook set to work at once to light a fire again; and I did not think it worth while to prevent her; for the negroes already knew that we were there; and if Mr. Thornton came at all, it would be to search the place, so

that the treacherous signal of the smoke could do us no harm. Indeed, in the present instance, it did us much good. Our breakfast was destined to be very scanty. Bread, there was very little. The fish was all consumed; and some eggs, which aunt Jenny roasted in the ashes, were all that remained of the more solid fare. Worst of all, we had no water; and I perceived, with no light apprehension, that if our enemies could not take us by storm, they might soon starve us out by a blockade.

We took it by turns to watch and to eat, making old Jenny breakfast first; but she had not assumed her post at the window for three minutes, when she exclaimed—

“Here dey comin’, mas’r—here dey comin’!”

Starting up, I ran to her side. I instantly saw the party, and distinguished who they were. Mr. William Thornton and his son had visited the old place, as they called it; found that I had taken Miss Davenport away; fixed

at once upon the cabin they had seen in the wood ; and pursued us thither.

They had dismounted at some little distance, had given the horses to the negro-boy, and were approaching towards the hut on foot, when I saw them. I placed on the table the powder and the slugs, and the two pistols, ready loaded.

“Bessy,” I said, “can you load rapidly, as soon as I have fired, in case of need?”

“Yes, yes,” she answered, “I have seen it done often. I am sure I can do it.”

“Then you stand between me and the table, Jenny,” I said, “and hand the weapons to and fro. As soon as I have fired, if I should have occasion to fire, give me another weapon. One man here,” I added, with a smile to encourage them, “is equal to five or six without.”

I then pushed back the shutter a little more, leaned the muzzle of the gun upon the sill, and looked out, careless of further concealment. Mr. Thornton’s party, that is to say, the three

white men, had stopped at the distance of about one hundred and fifty yards from the cabin, apparently to consult. But a moment after they turned to march forward again, and their eyes instantly fell upon me at the window.

CHAPTER XI.

I REMAINED perfectly still and silent at the window of the hut, with my eyes steadily fixed upon the other party, believing that some embarrassment would be felt by all of them in regard to their next step, if I gave them no excuse for violence.

I have often remarked that the most daring and unscrupulous men prefer provoking a quarrel, step by step, to plunging into a conflict at once. I was not mistaken in this instance. Mr. Thornton and his son both stopped again

when they saw me, and their consultation was renewed. They soon settled their plan, however, and did the best thing they could to attain their object, and throw the *onus* upon me.

Without speaking one word, they advanced in a body towards the door of the cabin, and had come within twelve or fourteen paces of it, when, finding that action was absolutely necessary, I exclaimed—

“Stand back, gentlemen. Do not advance any farther.”

“And why should we stand back, Sir Richard?” asked Robert Thornton, in a wonderfully calm tone.

“Simply, because if you advance a step farther, I will shoot you,” I replied with equal coolness.

“Upon what pretence, sir?” asked the elder Mr. Thornton, holding his son back. “We know that you are rather fond of shooting; but you generally contrive some excuse for it. Do you

remember, sir, that you are in a civilised country? that the cabin in which you are is my property? and that I simply require to enter what I may call my own house?"

"It is not yours, ole tief," cried Jenny from behind. "It's not on your land, nor of your building."

"Sir," I replied, "I am quite aware of what I am about. The cabin may be yours, or may not, for aught I know; but of this I am assured, namely, that you and your son, and that worthy with the red hair, are now in the prosecution of an unlawful enterprise—"

"To wit?" said Robert Thornton, with a sneer.

"To wit, then," I rejoined, "the abduction of a witness to a homicide committed by you yesterday morning, for the purpose of screening yourselves from punishment in due course of law. Your consultations were overheard; your motives are all known; and the execution of your plan in part susceptible of proof.

You now come here with superior force to take that witness from Virginian soil and my protection. Consequently, I feel myself justified in shooting you down one by one; and I will do it if you advance one step farther in execution of your designs. You know me, Mr. Robert Thornton!"

"But, sir, we do not entertain any such designs," cried old Mr. Thornton, his face growing redder than before, though it was rubicund enough at all times.

"I judge of your present motives and intentions by your past conduct, sir," I answered; "by your conduct yesterday, and the motives for that conduct expressed in the hearing of a competent witness. Therefore—stand back, I say!"

The latter words were uttered in a louder tone than the rest; and, as I spoke, I raised the gun to my shoulder; for the Irishman, seemingly tired of the discussion, had taken a step forward.

Old Mr. Thornton pulled him hastily back, not liking, I suppose, to bring a shot into their party, the especial direction of which he did not feel sure of.

“This is too bad!” he cried. “By —— this is too bad!” And he and his son entered into a low conference again. It was suddenly broken off, however, almost as soon as it had commenced, by some sounds which I did not hear.

“Run round those bushes, Mat,” cried Robert Thornton to the Irishman, “and see what horses those are coming up. Don’t let them see you—don’t let them see you.”

The other obeyed, hurrying round the clump in which the negroes were concealed; and father and son were soon deep in a whispered and hasty consultation, with their faces still towards the hut, and their backs towards the bushes.

My eyes continued fixed upon them for a moment or two; but then some sound—I know not what—made me raise them. The shrubs

which lay behind them, at not twenty yards' distance, were agitated as if by some large body passing amongst the branches; and the next instant, no less than four negroes drew out from the bushes with a stealthy, quiet step. The two first had each a gun raised to the shoulder, and pointed towards Mr. Thornton and his son, as if the men sought to approach nearer to their victims, but were prepared to fire as soon as they saw the slightest movement. The other two negroes were also armed; but they were at a somewhat greater distance, leading two or three horses through a gap amongst the brakes, where the beasts' feet would not make so much noise.

Though both father and son well deserved whatever fate they might meet, I could not bear to see two human beings shot down like wild brutes; and, by impulse, rather than anything else, I shouted—

“Take care! take care!”

And both started and turned round.

At their very first motion, there was a flash and a report ; and Robert Thornton fell forward on his face. His father staggered ; and then ran towards his horses, seemingly to shelter himself behind them ; but the young negro who was holding them, apparently terrified at what had occurred, cast the reins loose, and ran away as fast as he could go.

In the meantime, Nat Turner, who was standing in front of the shrubs, followed the flying man with his second barrel as deliberately as a sportsman follows a bird on the wing. Before he got near any of the horses, the trigger was drawn, and with a wild cry of pain, the old man fell upon his knees, and then sank gradually down.

At the same moment, Matthew Leary came running round with evident fear in his face, exclaiming—

“It’s the sheriff ! it’s the sheriff with a large party !”

The moment he saw his two masters on the

ground, he stopped short, like one thunder-struck, without uttering a word, and glanced his eye towards the cabin; but a shot from one of the negroes, who were leading up the horses, knocked his hat off, and soon showed him whence the murderous volley had come.

“Bring them up quick! bring them up quick!” cried Nat Turner, waving to the other men.

He had evidently heard the announcement of the sheriff’s approach; and he and two of his companions were mounted in a few seconds. The fourth seemed to have no horse; but ran to catch one of those which had brought Mr. Thornton’s party thither. This caused a little delay; and before they could escape, the sheriff’s party, consisting of nine or ten persons, appeared, some on one side of the little copse, and some on the other.

“Now,” I thought, “these blood-thirsty fellows are caught at last.”

But I was, in some degree, mistaken; and I

could not help admiring the presence of mind and ability displayed by Nat Turner in that perilous moment. The approaching party, attracted by the report of the guns, had come up at speed, and in some dismay ; nor were they, it would seem, at all prepared to meet with any of the revolted negroes there. In an instant, Nat Turner seemed to perceive where they were weakest and most scattered, as well as where he could soonest reach the difficult ground of the Swamp ; and, clubbing his gun, he dashed at that point, calling to the others to follow. He had to pass Matthew Leary as he went ; and the man attempted to catch his rein ; but one blow from the stock of the gun brought the Irishman to the ground ; and, had his skull been originally constructed in any other country than Ireland or Africa, he never would have risen again. It did not interrupt the negro for a moment in his course. A tall farmer tried to stop him likewise ; but he was struck from his horse in a moment.

The other negroes followed through the gap he had made in the line of the white men; and the three first burst clear through. The fourth was captured on the spot.

“Follow, follow quick!” cried the sheriff. “Take them, alive or dead.”

But Nat Turner and his companions galloped on, and scattered as soon as they got into more open ground. Pistol shots were fired after them; but on they went, plunging through the morasses, leaping the fallen trees, and taking advantage of every obstruction in the ground to distance their pursuers. One even had the hardihood to turn and fire upon a man who was chasing him; for one of the sheriff’s party returned shortly afterwards with a pretty severe wound in his shoulder.

In the meantime, I had unfastened the door of the cabin, and joined the sheriff and the four or five gentlemen who remained with him: Bessy, and old aunt Jenny, also, came

to the door, and one of those confused scenes of inquiry and explanation took place, which it is hardly possible to describe.

“Why, how is this?” inquired the sheriff, in his dry, laconic way, as soon as he saw us. “All sorts of birds gathered together! Miss Davenport, I am glad to see you safe at last. Your uncle Henry, with Billy Byles, has gone on to seek you across the line. But here is matter we must look to at once. Here, you fellow, you Leary ——”

“Don’t call me a fellow, sir,” said Leary, in an insolent tone. “I am a free American citizen, and as good as you any day.”

The sheriff’s lip curled with a contemptuous smile.

“I should not like to be as bad as you, Master Leary,” he said; “for I know I should have the penitentiary very often in my thoughts. But is your master here dead or living?”

“I know nothing about him ; and he’s no master of mine,” answered Leary ; “but I’ll just turn him over and see.”

In the meantime, the sheriff and most of the other gentlemen had dismounted ; and we all surrounded the body of Robert Thornton, who lay perfectly still with his face on the ground. Matthew Leary turned him over ; and we then saw a large pool of blood which had flowed from a wound in his chest, through which the bullet had passed out. It was on the left side, and there could be little doubt the shot had gone right through his heart. His career of wickedness was over. “His account was closed,” as a quaint old writer has it ; “every item transferred from the day-book to the ledger ; the balance struck, and the whole to be settled at the great day of reckoning.”

This is one of those cases of retributive justice which come from time to time to convince all who are convinceable of the moral government of God ; while the numerous ex-

ceptions form a strong argument—used potently by Voltaire—in favour of the immortality of the soul, the punishment of vice, and reward of virtue hereafter on that great day when every man shall be judged according to his doings.

Robert Thornton and his father had set out in life well to do in worldly circumstances; had deliberately cast from them the restraints of justice and honor, of religious and of moral principle; had gone on trusting to subtlety and fraud, in despite of repeated failures and reiterated warnings; had hardened themselves against the very reproofs of the results of their own actions, till they had deprived themselves of character and honor, of means and resources—till the very necessity of their condition drove them from bad to worse, while the hedged-in way of disgrace and ruin grew narrower and more inevitable at every step they took. And, at last, one of the two had fallen in a disgraceful scheme to cover one outrage by another.

“Here, leave him there,” said the sheriff, after we had gazed a moment upon the pale and inanimate features. “Nothing can be done for him. Who is the other lying out there?”

“That is Mr. William Thornton,” answered Matthew Leary; “but what’s become of the black boy, I can’t tell; unless he’s gone off with the other niggers. The old man’s as dead as a door-nail, I’ll bet; for his blood was so near the skin, that the least hole would let it all run out.”

“Hold your tongue, sir,” said the sheriff; “this is no time for joking.”

“Devil a bit am I joking,” answered Mat Leary, “as the priest said to us the other day, when he told us we were all going to hell and no mistake. I think he was right too.”

The sheriff moved sternly away, and, with the rest of the party, approached the spot where Mr. William Thornton lay. The wounded man was lying on his side as he had slipped down, rather than fallen; and, when

his face was visible, it was clear, that though badly hurt, he was neither dead nor in a dying condition. He said not a word to any one, though he must have known many of those present; but he gazed silently in our faces, with a clear undimmed eye as I have often seen a wounded bird. The first shot which had been fired at him, seemed to have grazed his shoulder; but the second had inflicted a much more serious wound in his hip, and he was bleeding profusely.

“We had better carry you to the cabin, and try to staunch the blood,” said the sheriff, bending down over him; “we can remove you to your own house afterwards.”

The old man made no answer; and some of the party took him up as gently as they could, and carried him between them to the hut, at the door of which still stood Bessy, with a very pale face. As they went, they could not help passing the body of Robert Thornton; and inadvertently took that side towards which the

old man's eyes were turned; but he gazed composedly at the corpse, without a word or an inquiry; and, indeed, I could not perceive the slightest change of countenance.

If human attachments had been lost either in the selfishness of pain, or the apathy of age, human resentments were not extinguished. They laid him on the table, and I whispered a few words to Bessy, who had shown so much skill in stopping the bleeding of my arm. She gave a slight shudder; but answered at once.

“Certainly Richard—I forgot—I did not think of it; but I have been terrified and shocked. I will try directly.” And, approaching the table, she said—“Let me try, gentlemen. I have had to do this before. Mr. Thornton, I think I can soon staunch the blood.”

The old man suddenly raised himself with a start upon his elbow, exclaiming, with the look of a demon—

“Get hence, girl! You have been the ruin of me and mine. We have never seen you, spoken to you, thought of you, I do believe, without some evil happening to us. Touch me not! Your very name has been a plague to us.”

“And well it might, Billy Thornton,” said a bluff old gentleman, who had come with the sheriff; “for you would never let any, who bore it, alone. You began all the mischief; and your son continued it. Who egged on the quarrel between poor Davenport, her father, and Richard Conway, when Conway wanted no quarrel at all? Who stopped the letter of explanation, and got Davenport killed, and was, more or less, the cause of Conway being drowned?”

“Hush! hush!” said the sheriff. “This is no time or place for recriminations. We must do the best we can to stop the bleeding ourselves, as he refuses the kind aid of hands that would do it better. Sir Richard,

you had better take Miss Bessy away out of the cabin, and get her some water—she looks faint. Send off one of the men to the Thornton old place, and bid them bring down a mattress and a cart. You had better let Mr. Henry Thornton and Billy Byles know you are here ; and then ride away with them to my house. It is the nearest ; and, though but' an old bachelor's residence, you will find a dear old maid there—my sister—who will make it comfortable to you, and cheer this young lady. Come, Miss Bessy, do not look so sad. All will go well yet ; and we who stand here living this day, without having lost our nearest and dearest, have much to thank God for."

"We have indeed!" said Bessy ; "and from my heart I do thank God."

I led her quietly out ; and, turning away from the spot where several of the party were still gathered round the deady body of Robert Thornton, I seated her on a little rise at the other end of the cottage, and then proceeded

to express the sheriff's wishes to some people before the hut. I hardly liked to leave her, even for a moment; for I had a sort of superstitious feeling upon me, after all that had occurred, that if I lost sight of her again, I should never behold her more.

Two men on horseback set out at once for the old place, as it was called; and, returning to Bessy's side, I strove to cheer her, and to lead her mind away from all the terrible and distressing events which had been crowded into so marvellously short a space of time. Indeed it was extraordinary, how three days in the midst of one year could have crowded into themselves in the midst of a peaceful and happy country, so many and terrible facts as occurred during the three principal days of the Southampton massacre.

We were allowed but very little time for anything like tranquil conversation, however. First, came back one of the men who had gone in pursuit of Nat Turner and his companions,

and then another. Dismounting from his horse, the first sauntered up to us, interrupting my conversation with Bessy, by saying—

“There’s no use trying to catch him. That man has got the devil in him, I do believe; and has got away into places where I wouldn’t take my horse, Maggie, for all the niggers that ever run. Isn’t she a pretty creature? Have you got any horses like that in England? I guess not.”

The next who came up was the poor fellow who got hurt in the pursuit; and he gave me and Bessy occupation for some time in bandaging his wound, though it did not seem a very severe one. This operation was not quite over, when the sheriff came out of the cabin and joined us. He was looking stern and somewhat irritated.

“That old man,” he said, “seems to have been taken possession of by Satan. He abuses everybody, and everything; and will make

his wound prove mortal, if he doesn't mind, by his own bitter irritability. What changes circumstances do produce in men! I remember him, not many years ago, one of the most jovial and good-humoured sort of persons I ever saw —always cunning and ready to take advantage, it is true, but still he did it all so good-humouredly that one was inclined to laugh rather than be angry."

"Don't you think," I asked, "that circumstances may have brought out the real character of the man, which cunning had concealed? We have a saying that the devil is good-humoured when he is pleased. I have seen more than once a man who carried on very artful schemes under an appearance of careless jollity, turn out fierce, malicious, and vindictive, when those schemes were finally frustrated."

"Perhaps you are right," answered the sheriff. "I have heard that he would occa-

sionally do a malevolent thing in former years. But here comes our friend Henry Thornton, I think—this man's very opposite in every respect. That is his head approaching at such a rate over the bushes of the Swamp, isn't it? Well, my dear young lady, how do you feel now?"

"Somewhat calmer," answered Bessy, quietly; "but I shall not be better, my good friend, till I have had two good things."

"And what are those?" asked the sheriff.

"A good sleep and a good cry," answered Bessy. "I have had the current of so many tears choked up during the last three days, that I feel they must flow over soon."

"Well," answered the sheriff, with a good-humoured sort of smile, "a good sleep, and a safe one, I trust you will soon have; but as to the good cry, I can't help thinking a good

mint-julep would be better. I wish to Heaven I had one to give you, or to drink myself either, for I am pretty weary and very thirsty."

CHAPTER XII.

As THE sheriff spoke, Mr. Henry Thornton, Billy Byles, and another gentleman, whose face seemed familiar to me, rode up towards the cabin, but checked their horses suddenly as they came upon the body of Robert Thornton, which was still lying where he had fallen. They had evidently not received full intelligence of what had occurred; for surprise, as well as horror, was in the expression of their faces. All three sprang to the ground and gazed at the corpse for a moment in

silence, while I and the sheriff advanced towards them.

“Why this is a terrible consummation !” said Mr. Henry Thornton, shaking me warmly by the hand. “How did this happen ?”

“Nat Turner’s work again,” said the sheriff, before I could reply ; “and the worst of it is, he has escaped us once more. He made his way through, and got into the Swamp in spite of all we could do, though we came upon him before the smoke was out of his gun. Old William Thornton is hard hit too, but he is still living, and would live, if he were to keep himself quiet and not curse, and swear, and abuse everybody.”

“I suppose I must be content then,” said the stranger, who had come up with the other two gentlemen ; “for I was just going to call this unfortunate fellow to an account, as I find he has brought suspicion and discredit upon me, and my back is not sufficiently broad to

bear all that people are inclined to pile upon it already.”

“Well, well,” said Billy Byles, “there is no use of talking any more about that, Halliday. All has been explained, and will be explained; and there lies Bob Thornton, the maker of all the mischief in the county, not likely to make any more mischief now, I fancy.”

“Sir Richard Conway does not recollect me, I presume,” said Colonel Halliday, speaking in a somewhat stiff and formal manner.

“I did not at first, Colonel Halliday,” I replied; “but I do now, and am glad to see you.”

“So am I to see you,” he answered; “for I have much wished to explain to you that these two men, though friends of mine from my youth up, were neither aided nor countenanced by me in their late conduct towards Miss Davenport. They, and two or three others who were with them, promised me faithfully to see her safe to Jerusalem, while I went on

to rescue some other young ladies from a somewhat dangerous position. Perhaps I ought not to have trusted to their word; for, I am sorry to say, I had known it violated before; but I had no suspicion at the time of anything like unfair-play, and I gave orders to two men to wait to let you know where Miss Davenport was. They, however, were frightened away by the arrival of the negroes. I hope this explanation will be satisfactory to you, sir; but, if it is not, all I can say is, I am ready."

"Hush! hush! nonsense!" said Mr. Henry Thornton.

And I immediately replied—

"It is perfectly satisfactory, Colonel Halliday, though it was unnecessary. Miss Davenport has already done you full justice; and I easily attributed the conduct which has been pursued to the right parties and to the true motives."

"Well, that is all right," said Billy Byles, in his easy, unconcerned way. "It is as well

to get things over one by one, ; and now that is settled, what is to be done with this poor fellow's corpse, Mr. Sheriff? It cannot remain lying here, you know. Had we not better take it up to the old place?"

"We cannot carry it out of the State," replied the sheriff. "It will be better to put it out of sight amongst these bushes, till the cart I have sent for, comes down to take the old man up to the house. We can then remove it to the cabin, and let it await the coroner's inquest there. In the meantime, Mr. Thornton, will it not be better for you and Sir Richard to ride over with Miss Bessy to my house? You will find my sister there, who will take care of the young lady; and if I might advise, she would not go farther to-day, for she must be worn out with all she has gone through; and, indeed, she looks tired to death."

"A very good plan," answered Mr. Thorn-

ton; "and, at all events, we will wait at your house till you return, Mr. Sheriff."

An alteration of plan, however, was forced upon us. The horses which had brought me and Bessy thither, were not found for half-an-hour, having hobbled away three quarters of a mile into the Swamp. And when they were found and brought back, they had to be saddled for our journey.

By this time, the cart which had been sent for, had arrived with a mattress stretched in the bottom. Old Mr. Thornton was carefully removed from the cabin and placed in the vehicle; and though a good deal reduced by loss of blood, he still seemed in a highly irritable and excited condition, cursing the men who moved him, for the pain they could not avoid inflicting. Three of the men who were present volunteered to accompany him to the old house; and the sheriff, after having given directions for sending for a surgeon, prepared

with all the rest to set off together across the marsh.

“Where’s old Jenny?” cried the sheriff as we were about to go, “where’s old Jenny? We must not go without her. She is really a good creature, and tended that unhappy man quite kindly, notwithstanding all his abuse.”

“Here I am, mas’r,” cried Jenny, coming out of the hut. “You go ’long, I’ll come after. Nobody hurt me, and I want to lay out Mas’r Robert.”

“No, no, Jenny, come along,” said the sheriff. “Let him alone; the coroner must see him just as he is. One of you lads catch that horse—or the other one there; I suppose they belong to William Thornton; but we must press one to carry the old woman.”

“No, no, I rather walk,” said Jenny eagerly. “I’se not ride a horse-back. It bumps me shocking; I’se too fat. If Miss

Bessy and Mas'r Richard stay beside me, I'll walk along wid dem."

Mr. Thornton and several others, however, determined to bear us company, and to keep at a walking pace across the Swamp; but we took a spare horse along with us in case Jenny, as I knew would happen, should get tired out before we reached the sheriff's house.

I could have been well pleased if old Aunt Jenny's own plan had been followed, for I longed for a quiet talk with dear Bessy; and the good old lady would have afforded no interruption to our conversation. With Mr. Thornton, however, talking to us the whole way, inquiring into all that had occurred, and giving us little pieces of intelligence in return—with Billy Byles, whistling one air upon our right, and a young farmer humming another behind us, anything like private conversation between the dear girl and myself was of course totally out of the question. Perhaps it was better

as it was ; for Bessy was certainly not in a condition to bear any more agitation ; and I, like most other men, might not have been quite as considerate as I ought, had the opportunity been afforded to me.

Our journey was of course very slow ; but it afforded an opportunity to Mr. Thornton to tell us all that had occurred since I had quitted the county town. The insurrection, he said, was now considered completely at an end ; the troops were returning to their several stations, and but a small body remained at Jerusalem, more to act as police in apprehending the fugitive malefactors, than to guard against any renewal of violence. Just as he was setting out, he asked us, to conduct Mrs. Thornton and his family back to their own home, the sheriff having come in, bringing William Thornton and his son as prisoners. The outrage they had committed upon the poor unoffending negroes, excited the greatest

indignation of the town. General Eppes had published a vigorous proclamation on the subject; warning the people to abstain from such barbarous acts, and it was with the greatest difficulty they could obtain bail for their appearance. They maintained sturdily that they know not what had become of Miss Davenport; and though they admitted that Colonel Halliday had placed her under their charge, they declared she had quitted their house that morning and they knew nothing more. A consultation ensued between Mr. Thornton and the sheriff, immediately after they had given bail and left the town. The suspicions of both fixed at once upon the place to which they had sent poor Bessy, and they arranged together to raise a large party and pursue the search for her, even into North-Carolina. They met early in the morning at the sheriff's house; and, somewhat to the surprise both of Mr. Thornton and Billy Byles,

they found Colonel Halliday of the party. That gentleman, Mr. Thornton went on to say, on returning from a long reconnoitring expedition, had been exceedingly irritated to find that Mr. William Thornton had broken his word with him, and that suspicions had been excited against himself, both in me and other, in regard to Bessy's disappearance.

“So angry was he,” continued Mr. Thornton, “that I thought it necessary to exact a promise from him, before we suffered him to go with us, that he would not proceed to any act of violence, against Robert Thornton, if we met with him, for he asserted what was very true, that Robert ruled his father completely.”

Almost all that occurred after they set out, we already knew ; for we had learned from the sheriff that neither he nor any of his party had the slightest idea that there was a cabin in the neighbourhood of the road they passed ;

and that it was only the sight of Matthew Leary watching them, and the report of two or three guns, which had brought them up to the spot where William Thornton and his son had fallen.

“I, Byles, and Halliday,” resumed Mr. Thornton, “here quitted the sheriff and the rest about a mile from the spot where we afterwards found you, and rode on to the old place, which Mr. William Thornton and his son had quitted but a few minutes before. An old negro called Samuel, on Halliday assuring him he would skin him alive if he did not tell us the truth, informed us that you had been there the night before with five or six men, and carried Bessy away with you. His two masters, he said, had gone to look for you; but it was with the greatest difficulty that we got him to admit that one of the old women about the place knew of a small hut, which had been built upon the line and had

watched you go in that direction. We forced her to give some explanation where the place lay; and soon after, passing the sheriff's men on the road, got farther directions.

“When we saw the body of Robert Thornton lying dead on the ground, we very naturally concluded, my dear Sir Richard, that a conflict had taken place, and you had shot him. I am indeed glad that it was not so; for this has been a sad business altogether.”

“It has indeed,” said Bessy Davenport; “the saddest week that Virginia has ever known.”

“Well, my love, we must submit to what God appoints,” responded Mr. Thornton. “And the first thing you have to do, Madam Bessy, is to take care of yourself, for you are looking quite haggard and old, and you will never get a husband if you don't put on better looks than that.”

Bessy gazed quietly up in my face, and a faint smile played about her lips; but Mr.

Henry Thornton went on without noticing it, saying—

“You must come home to-morrow, Bessy ; and, under your good aunt’s nursing, you will soon get as plump as a little partridge again.”

“There don’t you take dat road, Mas’r Thornton,” cried aunt Jenny, who was toiling along after us. “T’other is not quarter of a mile out of de way, and I do want to see what’s become of poor ‘Ercles.”

“Well bethought, aunty,” said Mr. Thornton ; “you are a good, kind old woman ; but really we must contrive to get you upon the horse, or we shall not reach home to-night. I must get to my own house this evening, Jenny, or the mistress will think we were all lost together.”

Poor Jenny, who was really tired by this time, was, with some difficulty, seated upon the inconvenient saddle ; and, though in compassion to her, we did not perform our cavalry

evolutions at very quick time, we certainly proceeded more rapidly than when she was on foot.

At the end of about an hour's march after Jenny was mounted, we reached the dwelling of Mr. William Thornton; and here we found another very curious exemplification of how rapidly news flies amongst the negro race in this country. We knew of no one who had crossed the Swamp in that direction but ourselves, since the fatal events had occurred at the State-line; for the sheriff had taken the other road; yet the negroes were now gathered together round the door of Mr. Thornton's house, evidently agitated by some strong feelings.

"Look at those poor people," I said, addressing Mr. Henry Thornton; "is it possible any rumour of what has befallen their master can have reached them?"

"More than probable," answered my friend; "there is no accounting for the rapid spread of

intelligence amongst the negroes. I have been sometimes really tempted to think that a bird of the air has carried the tidings. See, here comes one of them to ask us some question."

As he spoke, the girl who, the day before, had given me the only indication I could obtain of the direction in which Bessy had been taken, ran up as we were passing at a little distance from the house, and inquired, in a tremulous sort of tone—

"Oh, can it be true, Mas'r Henry, that dere hab been a fight out dere, and people killed?"

"No fight, my poor girl," answered Mr. Thornton; "but I am sorry to tell you, Nat Turner and his gang have been at more mischief, and your master has suffered."

The girl wrung her hands, and then said, in a low voice—

"And Mas'r Robert?"

"One has been killed, and the other badly

wounded," replied Mr. Thornton. "You will doubtless hear more about it soon, and learn more accurate particulars than I can give you. Who told you any thing of a serious nature had happened?"

On that point, however, as usual, we could obtain no satisfaction. One negro—and several had now gathered round—had heard it from another, also present, and he from a third, till it made a complete circle, and then went round again. It was evident that some or all were lying; and, giving the question up, Mr. Thornton inquired if they knew anything of the state of poor Hercules.

"He war very bad dis morning," said one of the men; and the girl shook her head and looked sad.

"Let us go on, uncle Henry," said Bessy. "I must see the poor fellow myself. It was in trying to serve me he was injured; and I must see him."

“Well, Bessy, I will not try to stop you,” said her uncle; “although, my dear child, I much fear you are over-exerting yourself, and must suffer for all this. Let us go on, however.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN we approached the little semi-circle of huts, which I have described before, and in which poor aunt Bab's negroes were lodged, there appeared no crowd round any of the doors, such as I had seen there on a preceding visit. On the contrary, all was now still and silent; and I could not but fear that the wounded man was dead.

Mr. Thornton, however, judged better.

"Oh, no!" he answered, when I expressed my apprehension; "they are most likely out in

the field. If he were dead, you would hear noise enough. It is only with people educated to control their feelings, that grief is silent. With these poor childlike creatures it is always noisy. But there is a horse's head between two of the huts. Perhaps Christy is with him."

So it proved. The good surgeon was there, seated on a little stool by the poor man's side, with his fingers on the pulse, and his eyes half closed, almost as if he were dosing. A woman and a child were also in the cabin, standing at a little distance behind the surgeon. Though she was the man's wife, she was quite a young creature—almost a child herself—and she looked quite bewildered with grief and apprehension.

We had opened the door without Doctor Christy moving or unclosing his eyes; but the moment Bessy Davenport entered, he started and looked up.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I felt it in the

poor devil's pulse. Miss Bessy, you have no right to make any one's pulse gallop so, has she, Sir Richard? Squire, your very humble servant. You have all come just in the nick of time, for I want help here. All the people are out in the field, and this poor girl is hardly able to help herself."

"Oh, dear Miss Bessy, I'se so glad to see you, and with your own people too," cried the poor man. "You 'se very good to come and see poor Ercles."

"Hush!" said the doctor, "not a word, if you would have me save your life."

"Oh, I knows I'se going to die any how, Mas'r Christy," said the man.

"You shall die if you talk, and I wont try to save you," answered the doctor.

"How hot his hand is!" said Bessy, who had gone up and taken the gigantic black hand in hers.

"Yes," said the doctor, oracularly; "he has had great irritation all night, and is now some-

what low. But I have made up my mind to two things, since I have been sitting here, in the hope that some sensible person would come to help me. The first is, that no vital organ has been touched, though, as so often happens in wounds, all sorts of mortal places lay in the way. The second is, that two balls were in the gun, fired so near that they did not spread at all, and that one of them is still in the wound."

"I feel it burning here, close to my back, mas'r," said Hercules.

"I dare say you do," answered the doctor; "nothing else could produce the symptoms which I perceive. Now, I must get that ball out; and I want some one to hold his right arm down while I operate; for yesterday he *would* move it. The poor fellow could not help it indeed—it was involuntary when he felt the pain."

"Can I do it?" asked Bessy, in a low timid tone.

“No, I thank you, Miss Davenport,” replied the doctor, with a quaint smile. “When I have a robin to operate upon, I will ask you to hold it, but not Goliath of Gath. Sir Richard perhaps, or Mr. Thornton will hold the arm; and we will reserve for you an easier task. Here, Miss Bessy, take the second bottle out of that little black-leather case there, and put about a teaspoonful in some water. Then stand here, while I seek for the ball; and give him the draught if you think he is likely to faint. We must guard against fatal syncope. Now, Hercules, if you are quite quiet, you shall have relief in a minute or two; and if you keep quiet you shall get well. Why, old Jenny, I did not see you. You can hold the hartshorn-and-water.”

“No, *I* will do it, Doctor Christy,” said Bessy. “I never have shrunk, and never wish to shrink, from that which is needful to help a fellow creature.”

“I know you don’t,” answered the surgeon ; and, baring his arm, he proceeded to place his patient in the proper position, and remove the bandages from the wound. Bessy turned her eyes away at first, and I could see her lip quiver a little with agitation ; but I would not interfere ; and Mr. Thornton, who was watching her face also, walked round and stood behind her, evidently believing that *she* might faint sooner than the patient.

The moment the operation began, however, she fixed her eyes upon the poor negro’s face, and seemed to watch for any change. At the end of a minute or two, (for the operation was a somewhat long one), she suddenly put the little cup to the man’s lips, saying—

“Drink some of this, Hercules.”

He drank ; and, almost at the same moment, Doctor Christy exclaimed—

“I have got it ! I have got it fast.”

“Oh, that is comfortable ! Oh, that is

cool!" cried the poor fellow, as the surgeon drew out the forceps, with the ball in their gripe.

"Ay, and you will do well now, Hercules," said the surgeon. "That fellow must have been a bloody-minded scoundrel to put two balls in the gun. You will do well now, I tell you."

"Dar say I shall, Mas'r Christy," answered the negro; "I feels quite easy like; and I do think I could fall asleep if Missy Bessy would but sing just a little bit. Many a time I'se stood to hear you a' singing under the window at ole Beavors."

"That I will, Hercules, if it can do you any good," answered Bessy.

And, sitting down on the little stool, with a voice that trembled, but was yet exquisitely sweet, she sung the negro song I have mentioned before—

"The shocking of the corn."

The poor man's young wife crept round, as she sang, and, kneeling at her feet, gently kissed her hand: the negro's eyes closed drowsily, opened, and closed again, in the sleep of exhaustion and relief; and Bessy, suffering her voice gradually to die away, closed the song at the end of the third stanza. The surgeon wiped something like a tear from his eye, and we all stole quietly out of the cabin.

“Well, I do think you are an angel after all,” said the good doctor, addressing Bessy, when we were in the open air.

“Hush, doctor, hush!” answered she almost sadly. “I never felt myself more completely mortal than at this moment—more weak—more worthless.”

“Well then, what is perhaps better than an angel,” added the enthusiastic old gentleman, “you are the best specimen of a right, true-hearted, Virginia girl. God bless them all! I never could get one of them to marry

me; but it was not my fault, and their good luck."

"But tell us about the other men," said Mr. Thornton. "I heard there were three wounded."

"Oh, mere flesh wounds," answered the surgeon; "they will get well without much doctoring, when negroes or labourers are in the scrape. They are very serious, of course," he added, with a comical smile, "when rich gentlemen and baronets from foreign lands are under our hands. With *them*, the cases are all very peculiar, and we get as much credit, and as many fees out of them as we can. I have no patience, however," he continued, "with this Robert Thornton, for putting two bullets in his gun to shoot a poor negro. I am sorry I helped to cure the bloody-minded scoundrel; and I shall tell him so the next time I see him."

"You will never see him more, Doctor

Christy," replied Mr. Henry Thornton. "He was shot dead this morning, by Nat Turner, near the State-line."

The good surgeon actually gasped with surprise; but he soon recovered his facetious mood; for, sometimes, doctors, like undertakers, become so habituated and familiar with death, that they can joke with the "lean abhorred monster," as if he were a boon companion.

"Nat Turner! again Nat Turner!" he cried. "Why, this fellow is ubiquitous. But I suppose his killing Bob Thornton will be a good thing for him; for, though a jury may condemn him for his other murders, of course the governor will pardon him in reward for this. I am sorry for the old man, however; he won't know what to do without his son. By his help, he had got three quarters of the way to the dogs already; and now he will have no one to show him the remainder."

“He will find it easily enough,” said Mr. Thornton, drily.

And, mounting our horses again, we were about to ride on to the house of the sheriff, when Bessy perceived that old Jenny was not with us. On inquiry, we found that she had remained in the cabin; and when the surgeon beckoned her out, she approached Mr. Thornton’s horse, saying—

“Please, Mas’r Henry, I think I’ll stay here, if you’se no objection.”

“What for, Jenny?” asked Mr. Thornton; “are you too tired to go on?”

“No, dat’s not it at all,” answered the good woman; “but I wants to help PHEME to nurse poor Ercles. You see, Mas’r Henry, PHEME’s no more nor a child in such matters; and she don’t know how to nurse her husband at all. So I’d better stay.”

“A capital good thought, auntie,” said the surgeon; “you and I have nursed many a

one through a bad illness before ; and you're a handy old girl."

"Then," said Jenny, "we are close by ole Will's house, and that er hoss belongs to him. So, if you just take him off the hook, he'll go way home."

"I'll see to that," said Doctor Christy. "You ride on to the sheriff," added he, addressing Mr. Thornton, Bessy, and myself, "and leave me and Jenny to manage the sick man, and the well horse, too."

The sheriff's habitation was different from any Virginian house I had seen, both in site and appearance. It was a low, cottage-looking structure, extending over a considerable space of ground, with its pleasant verandah all round it, and not seated, as usual, upon the very edge of the cleared part of the plantation, but still sheltered by the original wood. It was raised upon a little knoll in the forest, perhaps two hundred yards wide, and that

space only had been cleared in the vicinity of the house. It looked dry and comfortable, yet cool and shady, with the large trees devoid of underwood, forming a sort of grove all around it, and giving it much the aspect of an English forest-lodge.

The sheriff himself came out to receive us as we rode up, followed by his sister, of whom he had spoken; the very reverse of himself in many respects; for, whereas he was fully six feet, two or three, in height, she was very diminutive in stature, and certainly made up for the sheriff's occasional taciturnity by her own good-humoured volubility of tongue. In her dress, she was a perfect model for elderly ladies in a state of single blessedness. It was the perfection of trim neatness, from the beautiful, little, white apron to the small Quaker-looking cap. No superfluous ribbon—no gaudy colour—no fantastic ornament was there; but she put me in mind of some of

those neat, little brown birds, which are generally the sweetest songsters.

We were all welcomed heartily ; and a good deal of hospitable bustle took place to make arrangements for getting some more becoming clothes for Bessy and myself ; the little old lady, justly remarking, that we looked more like fugitives from the penitentiary than anything else.

Mr. Thornton, however, speedily set her anxieties on that score at rest.

“ I will just stay to take some dinner with you,” he said, “ and then ride on to my own house. As soon as I get there, I will send over some of my people, Bessy’s maid, and her own clothes ; for these she has evidently stolen somewhere. I took the liberty, Sir Richard, of bringing your man Zed over to my house ; and as I had the melancholy task yesterday of making all the sad arrangement at Beavors, I and Zed brought away your baggage from the

room you occupied there. Perhaps I had better send poor Zed over with such articles of apparel, et ceteras, as his taste and judgment may select. He will then have the opportunity of assuring himself, with his own eyes, that you are safe and well, for the poor man went about all yesterday evening mourning after you, with a voice as melancholy as a whip-poor-will."

"But, my dear sir," I answered, "you take it for granted that I am going to stay here when I have not even been asked."

"Oh that's of course," cried the sheriff. "Nobody thinks of asking his friends in this country; they always come when they like, and the invitation is understood."

"Pray do stay, Richard," said Bessy, laying her head on my arm. "I have a great deal to talk to you about to-morrow; for I am so tired, and feel so weak, that I shall go to bed soon this evening—do stay."

"Assuredly," I replied. "I was only put-

ting on a little mock-modesty about the invitation, Bessy."

"Well, well, go and wash your hands and faces," cried the sheriff. "We shall allow you time for no other toilet; for you have lingered so long on the road that I fear the dinner has spoiled, and I hear certain sounds issuing from the back of the house, which indicate that fried chickens are on their way to the dining-room. Listen, and you will presently hear a terrible crash, announcing that a large dish has fallen in the stone passage, and that Ham has tumbled out of the ark—a daily occurrence in Virginian houses, Sir Richard."

"No, brother Harrisson, I do declare," cried the sister. "It never happened in this house. Come away, Bessy, he's a libeller. Come away, Sir Richard, and I will show you both your rooms, quite snug, side by side."

"With a chink in the wall, like Pyramis and Thisbe's?" asked the sheriff, with a funny smile.

Bessy shook her finger at him with the rose bright in her cheek; and then we both followed his sister to two very neat little rooms, which looked charmingly comfortable and tidy, after the strange, wild scenes in which some of our nights had lately been passed.

When I returned to the parlour, I found Mr. Thornton and the sheriff in somewhat eager conference.

“We shall need you over at my house, and, perhaps, at Jerusalem to-morrow,” said Mr. Thornton, as I entered. “We would not, it is true, break up so pleasant an arrangement as Bessy has made for you; but business must be attended to, Sir Richard.”

“What, in *Virginia*?” I asked with a smile, remembering his own description of the business-habits of the people. “However, my dear sir, I will not promise to be over before two o’clock, for Bessy and I have really a great deal to talk of. She is my devisee, you know,

Mr. Sheriff; and, of course, our business is very important—though I have some suspicion, my good friend,” I continued, turning to Mr. Thornton, “that the clever arrangement we made for conveying all my right, title, interest, etc., to one Bessy Davenport, spinster, will have to be remodelled.”

“We shall see,” answered Mr. Thornton, quite gravely.

“At all events, our business is important,” I urged.

“Not half so important as that which waits us in the next room,” cried the sheriff impatiently, “if these two women would but come. Now, I’ll answer for it, that excellent sister of mine is making our dear little friend give her a true, full, and particular account of all that has occurred to her during the last week; totally forgetting those fried chickens we were talking of. Jack,” he shouted aloud from the door, “go and throw down a large china dish

at your mistress's door, to let her know that dinner is ready. Mind you break it all to pieces with a good smash."

"Brother, brother, I am coming," cried his sister, who, of course, had heard the whole. "Don't be so foolish; the man might misunderstand you. Come, Bessy, my love, these voracious men are ravenous for their dinner."

I must acknowledge that I certainly was ravenous for mine. Poor Bessy had every right to be hungry also; for we had not tasted any food since the preceding night. It is, indeed, wonderful, how agitation, alarm, or the eager activity of the mind, exercised in any way, will stay the cravings of appetite; and, at all events, it is not till a certain point is reached that hunger is at all felt when we are earnestly and vigorously employed. Oh, those two strange twins of Leda, mind and body, the godlike and the earthly! Though the one

may rise when the other sets, the power of the one can always dominate over the other.

In fear for her china dishes, the lady of the house very speedily entered the parlour, followed by Bessy, and we were soon seated at a comfortable and well-supplied country table, where everything that farm, garden, stream, and woodland could supply, was found in abundance. Nor to our appetites, purified by fasting, did anything seem over-cooked or under-cooked, although the sheriff, with less than his usual tact, decried some of the dishes as being too much done.

“Well, my good friend,” rejoined Mr. Thornton, “we have only to apologise to your sister, by saying we have spoiled her dinner by deviating a little from the straight road on our errand of charity. We went to see that great, big fellow, Hercules, who was shot by Robert Thornton yesterday morning; and when once there, Doctor Christy kept us to aid in all sorts of operations.”

“How is he, how is he?” asked the sheriff. “Had I thought of it, I would have passed that way myself; but I have so many matters jostling each other in my mind just now, that one half of them escape notice or remembrance in the crowd.”

“The man, I hope, is likely to do well,” observed Mr. Thornton. “The good Doctor extracted a second ball just now; but I think Bessy was the best doctor of the two, for she sang him to sleep, though he had not been able to close an eye for the last twenty-four hours. It was not the best compliment to your song, my dear niece, to fall asleep over it; but I dare say it will do him a great deal of good.”

“It was the best compliment I could wish him to pay me,” replied Bessy; “for it was that at which the song was aimed. But you, gentlemen, my good uncle, often think that we women are seeking for compliments when nothing is less in our thoughts. Besides, I

would never think of seeking one in your presence, being sure that you would spoil it before it reached me.”

In such conversation, with the agreeable accessories of eating and drinking, and the pleasant, soporific sort of consciousness of being once more in a comfortable chair in a comfortable house, and safe amidst all the charming little luxuries of civilised life, three quarters of an hour passed away very quietly, and then Mr. Henry Thornton rose to depart.

I walked by the side of his horse for some way along the road, pretending to myself to desire much to know what were the matters of business which he wished to discuss with me the next day ; but, in reality, much more anxious to ascertain what was the cause of a certain gravity which had tinged his manner, when I had vaguely hinted at the possibility of Bessy Davenport becoming my wife. He did not easily take my hints ; but, at length,

I came so nearly to the plain question, that he could neither mistake, nor affect to mistake my meaning.

“The truth is, my friend,” he said, “Bessy believes that there are insuperable obstacles; and depend upon it, she does not think so without cause. She is very tenacious in her resolutions; but she always believes, at least, that they are founded on good motives and sound reasons; for, lively and playful as her manner is, I know nobody who is at heart less of a coquette than Bessy Davenport. Before deciding in this instance, she put several questions to me by letter; in answer to which I was obliged to tell her the truth, although she did not conceal from me, that the reply which I was forced to make might greatly affect her own happiness.”

“Would there be any objection to your telling me the question she put to you?” I asked.

“I think that would be hardly fair, my dear

young friend," answered my companion. "But it seems you are to have a conference to-morrow, and then, doubtless, all will be explained to you by herself. All I can say is, I wish you success with all my heart; and, I trust, that the various scenes you have lately gone through together, and the vast services and kindnesses you have rendered her will be found to outweigh all objections. Yet I will tell you fairly, Sir Richard, that I entertain considerable apprehensions—and I grieve to entertain them—in regard to the result to her own health, whether she marries you, or whether she does not."

"What you say puts all my conjectures at sea again," I replied; "for you, at least, must be well informed as to the events of preceding years; and I fondly fancied, up to this moment, that she had made a great mistake, which I could easily rectify. However, I would rather hear the whole facts from her lips, than from any other's; and, as she has

already promised to leave the decision to me, I assure you, Mr. Thornton, I will try to decide as may be most for *her* happiness, rather than for my own."

"Do so, do so, I beseech you, Sir Richard," replied Mr. Thornton. "To break such a heart as hers, would be worse than a murder; it would be a sacrilege."

There, we parted; and, walking back to the sheriff's house, I found Bessy still in the parlour with himself and his sister, although, by this time, it was growing dark.

"I have stayed to wish you good-night, Richard," she said; "but I must really go to bed now, for I am fairly worn out. When shall our conference be? to-morrow, Richard? Before breakfast, had it not better be? You know my early hours, and I can never sleep after five, if I try."

"I will be down before then," I answered; "and we will make a regular appointment to

meet here, dear Bessy, if we do not shock too much our kind host and hostess."

"Oh no, do as you like," cried the sheriff.
"You are beyond my competence."

Bessy had spoken perfectly calmly and quietly throughout, with not the slightest trace of doubt or agitation. And when she had wished the sheriff and his sister good night, I walked with her to the door, and into the passage.

"I wish I could be as calm as you are, Bessy," I said, with a sigh.

She looked up in my face, and put her hand upon mine, gazing at me with an earnest, steadfast gaze.

"I am calm, Richard," she answered, "because the decision of my fate and of him whom I love best on earth, is entirely in his own hands, and because I have such faith and trust in his judgment, that I have almost taught myself to believe his decision will satisfy my

conscience whatever pre-conceived opinions I might now entertain. But let us not enter on it now. Let us decide all to-morrow. Good night, dear Richard, good night !”

“Stay a moment,” I said, holding her hand. “I have got something in trust for you here. These papers were found upon your table at Beavors by Nat Turner, and he gave them to me. Believe me, dear Bessy, when I tell you, that although I knew they contained a clue to all the painful mystery, which within the last week or so has made our intercourse one of doubt and anxiety instead of joy and hope, I have not read one word.”

“Oh, you might have read them,” she said ; “but never mind ; you shall read them to-morrow, and then tell me what I am to do. You are the lord of my fate, and I will obey you as—as my—”

“Husband,” I added, hope springing up anew. “I must have one kiss before we part, after such scenes. If to-morrow I find I am

wrong in taking it, I will give it back again."

She gave it readily, murmuring—

"Oh, Richard, if such are your bargains, I know already how you will decide."

Then, freeing herself from my arms, she ran away, and left me.

At the end of little more than an hour, Zed and Julia, Bessy's maid, made their appearance, with a quantity of goods and chattels, sufficient to half fill the cart in which they came.

Soon after their arrival, I, too, went to bed, and only feared that, in the unwonted softness of my couch, I might oversleep myself on the following morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT it was that woke me, I know not. It certainly was not the lark, for there is no such heavenly benison of dawn on this side of the Atlantic. It might indeed be a crowd of those large birds of the swallow tribe which they call here the bee-martins, who had congregated round the windows daring each other to wanton, purposeless flights. But I think it was something within, rather than without—some of those strange, silent operations amidst which the mind still lives and acts when ap-

parently dead in sleep—some of the heart's sentinels calling the watches of the night.

I was to rise to meet Bessy in the early morning; and I did not lie awake to count the hours: I was too weary for that. I slept and slept soundly the allotted time; and then I woke as if a voice had said, "Arise!"

The day was yet unconfirmed; the hues of the east were still russet, rather than red; but, as I dressed myself, the rose and the gold must have grown stronger in the sky; for many a magic hue poured varying through the pathways amongst the trunks of the old trees, and, streaming across the turf that covered the little rise on which the house stood, seemed to spread a many-coloured carpet before the windows.

I took some pains in my toilet; but I was in the parlour and at the window some time before five o'clock struck.

I amused myself with gazing forth; and the quiet, pleasant scene, with the sun at length,

“*perfundens omnia luce,*” sank into, and refreshed, the spirit.

But that spirit was all the time busy with other things. It was like thinking in the midst of music—one of the sweetest things I know in life when the heart is at ease—when we feel that harmony—are harmonized by it—and yet lose not one thread of the golden web we are weaving. There was a certain degree of waywardness in my mood, which, perhaps, that morning-scene encouraged, though I know not whence it originally sprung—a feeling of power, which I was inclined to sport with. May I own it? I experienced, I fancy, some of the sensations of the despot, when he remembers how much happiness or misery hung upon his will. Could it be that the treacherous heart was too conscious of the power Bessy had given me to decide her fate and mine for both? No, no, I will not believe it; and, at all events, if I was inclined, as I have said, to sport with the power, I was not inclined to

abuse it. But, somehow, during the calm, refreshing sleep of the preceding night, confidence had returned; and I felt as if something was ever whispering in my ear that there could be no possible circumstance in the past or the present which could place a barrier between me and her I loved.

Bessy did not keep me long waiting; for she was by my side before the clock had finished striking; and, oh, she looked very lovely, though her cheek was paler than usual, and her eyes somewhat languid. The eye-lashes looked longer and darker than ever, the iris more full, though more shaded by the drooping lid. The beautiful, dark, silky hair was perhaps not arranged with all the trim care of former days; but the wavy lines were more plainly seen, making, as some old poet called it, "traps for sunbeams."

I could see that she had made up her mind to her fate during the night—that she had prejudged my decision—or else felt that, after all

that had passed, we could not be separated; for when she gave me her hand, she held up her lips to me also for the morning kiss, as if she would have said—"I know how it must be."

Bessy had got the packet of letters in her hand; and I was leading her to the sofa, but she stopped me, saying—

"Let us go out amongst the trees, dear Richard. You know what a wild, fanciful girl I am; and when I have to encounter anything that is likely to agitate me, I would rather have breathing room in the free air, and trees, and flowers, and birds around me, in preference to tables and chairs."

"And do you think anything will agitate you this morning, love?" I asked, somewhat maliciously, I am afraid.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "How can it be otherwise? although I know quite well, Richard, how you will decide, and what you will say; and I will abide by my promise;

yet the very talking of such things must agitate me much."

"I do not think you know what I will say, dearest," I replied, walking by her side towards the door. "I may have much more to say than you can even guess. But let us go out. I prefer the free air, too, my beloved. Under the clear sky, one feels in the presence of a purer power; and with the great trust you have placed in me, I should wish to deal as if the eye of God were visibly fixed on me the whole time."

We went forth together, passed across the little open space, and wandered on a short distance into the wood to a spot where we could see the cleared part of the plantation without being quite hidden from the house. We there seated ourselves in the shade, though a ray of the early sun stole through between the trunks of the old giants, and crossed with a gleam of golden light, Bessy's tiny foot and delicate ankle.

She laid the bundle of old letters upon my knee, and was apparently about to speak of them; but I forestalled her, taking her dear hand in mine, and holding it there.

“Bessy,” I said, “these have been four eventful days—ay, and four eventful months to both you and me.”

“They have indeed!” she answered, with a sigh.

“Have you remarked,” I continued, “how fortune has seemed to take a pleasure in binding our fates together link after link in a chain that cannot be broken? How, from the first, event after event drew us nearer and nearer to each other, as if to sport with all your cold resolves, and with my unreasonable expectation?”

“It would seem so truly,” she answered, gazing down on the grass in thought.

“Let us recapitulate, my beloved,” I said, “before we go farther. Here, to begin with

myself; in man's true egotistical spirit, as you would have said not long ago, I came to this country, without ever dreaming that I should find any one to excite anything in my heart beyond a passing feeling of admiration. I had made no resolves; but I had gone through many years, and scenes without ever seeing a woman I could wish to make my wife—without seeing any one to love, in short."

"And to fall in love, at length, with a wild Virginian girl quite unworthy of you!" said Bessy, looking up with one of her old bright smiles.

"Nay," I answered, "to find a treasure where I least expected it. But let us go on—"

"Ay, but you have not added, dear Richard," she said, still smiling, "that you did not think it at all a treasure when you found it first."

"Perhaps, I did not recognize its full

value," I replied. "But I soon found it out when I came to see it nearer."

"I do not wonder that you saw nothing worth caring for in me at first," rejoined Bessy. "If you had hated me, and despised me, I could not blame you; for when I think of my sauciness and folly that night and the next morning, I feel even now quite ashamed of myself. But there is some excuse to be made for a wild, somewhat spoiled girl, Richard, who has never known love, or what it means, or what it is like. She says and does a thousand things that she would never think of if she had a grain more experience. But now tell me, when was it you began first to judge a little more favourably of me? for all this has grown upon us so imperceptibly that I do not really know where it began."

"It began, on my part," I answered, "that morning when we first rode over to Beavors—when you and I went to look at the pictures in

the dining-room together. Then Bessy let me get a little peep at her heart, and that was quite enough, dear girl. I was more than half in love with you, Bessy, when we mounted our horses to return after the storm. It was high time that I should be so, Bessy; for I do not think if there had not been something more buoyant in my breast than mere humanity, we should ever have got out of that river."

"I am afraid, Richard," said Bessy, "that by that time, there was something more buoyant, as you call it, in my bosom, too. I don't mind telling you now, but all that afternoon, at Beavors, I had been feeling very strangely about you, and could not be half so saucy as I wished. I do not think I should have cared much about being drowned before I knew you; but then I did not like the thought of it at all."

"Well, love," I answered, "that adventure

was the first of those links between us, which I am now recapitulating—danger of the most desperate kind shared together.”

“Ay,” cried Bessy, eagerly, “and benefits conferred—life saved—bold and noble daring to save it—oh, Richard, how could I ever think of making you unhappy after that?”

“Assuredly, it bound us very closely together,” I answered. “No two people, after having experienced such sensations of interest and anxiety for each other, could ever feel towards each other as they did before.”

“It was very soon ‘Richard and Bessy’ after that,” she answered, thoughtfully. Then, raising her eyes to mine, with one of her sunny smiles, she added—“and I fancy in our own hearts it was ‘dear Richard’ and ‘dear Bessy.’”

“It certainly was in mine, dear girl,” I replied; “but there were other ties to be added, Bessy: the interest you showed in me—your anxiety about me, before the duel with

Robert Thornton, and your gentle care and tendance afterwards ; but, more than all, your frank kindness, and the courage of your tenderness, were never to be forgotten by me. Bessy, I do not think, if nothing else had happened to link us still more closely together, we could ever have made up our minds to part. But more, much more has happened since then—how much within the last three days ! Our flight together from a terrible fate—”

“Your saving me from death a second time,” she added.

“The strange, close intimacy into which we were thrown during our long wanderings—intimacy such as, perhaps, never before existed between two unmarried persons.”

“And which you used so nobly,” she added. “Oh, Richard, if there were nothing else but your generous, delicate kindness during that night and day—kindness which, while I loved you as a wife, made me trust and rely upon .

you as a brother—were there nothing but that, I should, I believe, feel myself justified in overleaping barriers which would be insurmountable in other circumstances, and casting away all consideration but of what is due to you.”

“But my happiness must not be alone consulted,” I replied. “Whatever we do, must be for your happiness also. Dear Bessy, you have lain and slept in these arms; your head has been pillowed on this bosom; your heart has beat fondly against mine. Now tell me, would you withdraw yourself from that resting-place?”

“Oh, no, no, no!” she cried; “never, never! I can never have any other upon earth.”

And leaning her head upon my bosom again, she wept.

“And will you be perfectly happy here?” I said, putting my arm around her.

“There,” she said, raising her head with a

start, but without answering my question, "there, you need not read those papers, Richard. It needs no further consideration. I am yours, willingly, readily—without a doubt. Give me the letters. I will throw them away; and, with them, I will try to cast off all memory of what they contain. But you must promise me one thing, Richard. If, in after times, when I am your wife, you should see some shade of sadness come upon me, a slight and temporary gloom, as if a cloud were passing across a summer's sky; you must not for a moment think that Bessy regrets what she has done—that there is even a shade of repentance, or, as I once called it, remorse, for you have opened my eyes. I see what is right to be done, and I will do it, both for your happiness and for my own. A memory, however, of what these pages contain, may perhaps from time to time come back and sadden me whether I will or not. But it is well that it should be so—that there should be

some little thing to take away from the very sweetness of the cup. Were it not for that, I should be too, too happy. Life would be too bright, and I should hardly know how to bear it. Give me the papers, Richard. We will think of them no more."

"May I not read them?" I asked.

"Yes, if you will," she answered; "though I see no use in it. They may make *you* sad, too; and my course is now completely decided. If you still wish it, this hand is yours, and nothing but death shall take it from you. It can serve no good purpose to read those sad words."

I drew her very close to me, and kissed her cheek, saying—

"It may serve a very good purpose, Bessy. If I am not mistaken, it will enable me, I do believe, to remove from your mind an error, which, as you have said, might grow into a sad memory, might overshadow our mutual happiness as we stood together at the altar,

and often come like a dark cloud over the brightness of our future fate."

"Indeed!" she exclaimed, with a doubting and bewildered look; "I do not see how that can be, Richard."

"May I read, Bessy?" I again asked.

"Assuredly," she answered; "do, if you wish it. But there is only one which it is needful for you to read, and that is not very long. It is here."

And turning the papers over rapidly, she pointed to one, which had the post-mark, I think, 'Yorktown.' She then put her hand over her eyes, as if resolved not to see the letters any more; and, still leaning her head on my shoulder, remained silent while I read.

The letter ran as follows; for having it by me as I write, I may as well copy it as it stands:

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"Mr. Winthorp brought me your letter of inquiry yesterday, and also one

from Mr. Hubbard. But it was late at night before I received them; and though I notified the sheriff and the magistrates immediately, it was considered too late to do anything that night. Alas, that I should say it! it was too late altogether.

“Early this morning—one of the saddest mornings I have ever seen—I went out to the village; and, upon inquiry, found that the constable, and a *posse*, had gone out in one direction, while there was reason to believe that Colonel Davenport had gone in another; that is to say, down towards the bank of the river, so as to have the means at hand for either party to escape out of the State. I rode whither these hints directed me as fast as I could, though, God help me! I had no power or right to interfere. Had I possessed either, I was too late, however; for the matter was all finished and over, and the deed was done before I arrived in the meadow.

“It is very sad to have to tell you that of

two dear friends, I found one dead, and the other almost in a state of distraction. Davenport had been killed at the first fire, and *Sir* Richard Conway was nearly insane at the act which he had committed. Tearing his hair and wringing his hands, he sometimes walked up and down the field, and sometimes stopped to gaze upon the dead body, crying out that he had killed his best friend, his brother, the man he most esteemed on earth. In fact, he spoke very hard words of himself, but still harder of another, who shall be nameless, but whom he accused of having nursed up a jest into a quarrel, and a quarrel into a murder; and who he said had suppressed a letter offering every explanation on his part which an honourable man could give.

“The man he spoke of, was there upon the field present; but he kept out of his way, and being a near connexion of yours, though I believe you are ‘scarce cater-cousins,’ I think it better not to allude to him more particularly,

although all the people present, who were in numbers quite unbefitting the occasion, laid much blame to his charge, and I had some fear that violence would be shown to him.

“Davenport was dead, and there was no help for it; but Conway’s grief seemed to touch them much; and when a report spread that the justices were coming, they hurried your brother down as fast as possible to a boat which was in readiness, whether he would or no; and one of them got in with two sailors to steer him over to the Eastern shore of Maryland.

“I trust, my dear madam, that you will communicate these sad facts as gently as possible to her who has the deepest and the saddest interest in them—unless, indeed, Rumour, who has a thousand wings, as well as a thousand tongues, has carried to her the tidings before this reaches you.

“I may add, and I do it reluctantly—although I tell you fairly, I give no credit

whatever to the report—for whenever any thing sad and disastrous occurs, it is sure to give rise to a thousand vague whispers of other calamities—that a rumour has reached this place, since the fatal event of the morning, that a boat has been capsized in the bay, having four persons on board all of whom were lost; and credulous people will have it that this was the boat which was carrying your brother. However, you may make your mind quite easy, on this score; such a thing occurs very rarely in the Chesapeake, and I dare say the whole tale is a fabrication. Yet I cannot but condole with you very sincerely upon the terrible disaster which has actually occurred. That is sufficient without anything more to strike you with profound grief; for to see such near connexion falling by each other's hand to the disruption of all family ties and kindred associations, is indeed very terrible; although I am inclined to think that neither Davenport nor Conway were so much

to blame as those who pretended to act as their friends.

“ Believe me to be,

“ My dear madam,

“ With sincere sympathy and respect,

“ Your faithful friend and servant,

“ AGAR HARCOURT.”

“ *Post scriptum.*—I am truly grieved to inform you that the rumour of a boat having been lost, proves to be too true. Do not alarm yourself yet. We have no particulars; but simply that about ten o'clock this morning a small boat was seen crowding sail across the bay when by some sudden accident, no one knows what, she was seen to capsize at a great distance from shore. No assistance could be rendered; for all the vessels which saw her were far-distant, and a gale was blowing at the time. Let us hope for the best, however, and put our trust in God.”

I read the letter attentively. I scrutinized—I examined every word. There was no doubt it was a genuine letter from some gentleman I had never heard of to good aunt Bab. Yet there was something wrong. There must be some mistake. The post-mark was there—the address was written in the same hand as the letter itself; but there was some mistake or some fraud about it.

At length, I turned to the docket written in a neat, round, legal-like hand, and in very fresh ink; and it gave me the clue. This Mr. Agar Harcourt, who had written the letter, was evidently intimately acquainted with all the parties and could not have made a mistake. The letter expressed what he believed to be true, and there was no probability of his believing anything that was not true. Yet there was a falsehood somewhere. The docket, however, read thus—

“Letter, from the Rev. Agar Harcourt to Mrs. Barbara Thornton in regard to the death of Colonel Edward Davenport by the hands of

Sir Richard Conway, baronet, father of the present Sir Richard Conway, now serving in the——regiment of dragoons in the Presidency of Bombay.”

I could easily conceive how such a letter, so designated, must have affected my dear Bessy when first she saw it. What feelings of terror and anguish and hesitation must have been produced in her mind, when she learned to believe that she was about to give herself, heart and mind and soul and body, to the son of one who had slain her own father. My mind, though not light, was relieved; for I knew that, by other proofs, I could show her the error easily; yet I wished to prove it to her from the letter itself—to show her the villany which had been perpetrated, and which I knew that letter, if thoroughly and properly analysed and scanned, must display in some part.

I accordingly turned to the very beginning again, and read it once more, examining every word.

In the meantime, Bessy removed her hand from her eyes, weary of waiting for my long examination. She fixed them on my face, however, and not upon the letter; and, at length, she said in a low and timid tone—

“Well, Richard, was not that enough to shake and terrify and almost drive me mad?”

“It was, my love,” I answered, pressing her closely to me; “and I grieve that a scoundrel should have had the power to inflict upon you such pain. You shall suffer no more on this account, Bessy; but let me go on and examine this paper more closely.”

“Oh it is certainly Mr. Harcourt’s handwriting,” replied Bessy. “There are several more of his letters there, and I have got two or three others. I know his writing quite well.”

“I doubt it not,” I answered; “yet there is a falsehood, somewhere. Let me examine farther, dear girl.”

I read the first page, and part of the second; and then something struck my eye which made me pause.

“Look here, dearest,” I said. “This docket on the back tells you that this is a letter describing the death of Colonel Davenport—your father I presume—by the hands of Sir Richard Conway, whom it points out as *my* father. The docket purports to have been written when I was serving with a regiment in the presidency of Bombay; that is eight years ago, Bessy; for I exchanged almost immediately after that period, when I was merely a Cornet, into a regiment in Bengal. Yet the ink seems to me exceedingly fresh. I suspect it has not been upon the paper more than ten days. But now mark another thing. Look here at this line, you see it stands thus—‘Davenport had been killed at the first fire and—’ The line is almost full if you end with that word ‘*and* ;’ but, crowded in at the end of the line is the small word, ‘*Sir*,’ and then,

in the next line come the words, 'Richard Conway;' If you will remark closely the handwriting and the ink of that small word, 'Sir;' you will perceive that the one is different and the other bluer than those employed in the letter."

"I see, I see!" cried Bessy eagerly. "It is different; but what object could be attained by adding that word?"

"To bear out the docket that was written by Robert Thornton," I answered; "and to snap the love and the engagement between us like a withered twig by making you believe that my father had killed your father, and the parricidal drops would stain the hand which you clasped in mine at the Altar. Then you did believe it, Bessy?"

"I did indeed," she answered. "But where you have twice saved my life, Richard, where you have risked your own to do it—where you have been so kind, so noble, so generous, surely, surely, the barrier is broken-down, the

stain wiped out, and my father himself may look down and bless us—Oh do not gaze at me so! Tell me, tell me what you mean? What do your looks mean? Is it not so? Is not this letter true?"

"No, no, no! Bessy," I answered. "With the interpretation put upon it, and that small word 'Sir,' added, it is not true! My father, Sir *Henry* Conway, was never in America in his life; though my uncle, Major Richard Conway was. My father died only thirteen years ago. My uncle, Richard Conway, was drowned in Chesapeake Bay some nineteen or twenty years ago. Richard Conway was the youngest son and never inherited the baronetcy. That word '*Sir*' was introduced solely to make you believe he was my father. Cast all feelings of doubt and hesitation from your mind, my beloved. My uncle, it is true, may have killed your father for aught I know; for I never heard of the fact till now; but believe me my father was as innocent of your

father's blood as I am; and I have every reason to believe, from what I have heard this day, that my uncle would have been as innocent also, if it had not been for the base and treacherous conduct of old William Thornton, who was your father's second, and who would not suffer an honorable explanation to take place.

“And now, my beloved Bessy, have I not kept my word with you? Have I not extracted from this letter—which was meant to poison your peace, to divide you from a man who truly loved you, or to render your union with him a wretched one—the antidote to its own venomous insinuations?”

Bessy did not answer. Some minutes before, while I was clearing away cloud after cloud from her mind, and she had hidden her face upon my bosom, I thought that I felt her heart beating violently; but now she was quite silent and still—so still that, for a moment, I thought she had fainted, I raised her head gently, and saw

that the tears were flowing fast from her eyes. She wiped them away hastily ; and through the drops beamed a bright smile, telling me they were not drops of sorrow. She hid her face again ; but I heard her murmur—

“ They have come at last, Richard—they have come at last, and will bring relief—do not wish me to check them : they are full of joy and comfort.”

“ Then weep on, dearest,” I said ; “ and may you never shed any but such tears as these.”

Gradually she grew more composed, and looked up, saying—

“ Oh, this is a happy hour ! It is like the clearing away of dark mist ; not alone giving back sunshine to the spot where we stand, but opening out bright prospects all around us.”

“ Then I may tell your uncle that you are mine without doubt or hesitation ?” I asked.

“ Yours, joyfully, gladly,” she answered. “ Richard, if ever you thought me a coquette, you shall not think me so now ; for you shall find

me as ready to own my love as I was formerly to declare I never could love. How you ever came to love me, I cannot tell; but I know right well how I came to love you; and I should hate and despise myself if I did not."

"I came to love you very easily, dear Bessy," I answered. "It was simply, as I told you one day, I found you out."

"And I did not believe you," she replied; "but no wonder; for then I had not found myself out. But there is one thing that puzzles me still, which is, why—for what cause, or on what motive, Mr. William Thornton has so persecuted me and mine. I can easily believe that Robert was moved only by the desire for money, and the habit of fraud; for all the country knows what he was; but as for his father, I have heard people say, who knew him in his youth, that he was a gay, thoughtless, open-hearted man, who spent all he had, and more, with profusion, rather than liberality; yet even at the time of my poor father's death, it

would seem he had the same bad feelings towards us, though he concealed them."

"It is indeed strange," I replied, remembering the extraordinary vehemence of hatred the old man had displayed towards Bessy herself. "There may be some mystery in the business; but it were as well not to inquire into it too far, dear Bessy. Let us be content that we have frustrated all their schemes against us, without prying into their motives. There is, they say, a skeleton in every house; and we may as well not open the closet door. Something puzzles me also," I added; "but that is of no very fearful nature. It is this: that your uncle Henry did not know all the circumstances of this sad affair between your father and my uncle; for only yesterday he seemed to think you had good grounds for refusing to unite your fate with mine."

"I do not think he knows anything but what I wrote to him," replied Bessy. "At the time the duel was fought, he must have

been in Europe ; for about that time, he travelled with my aunt for three years ; and the subject has been carefully avoided ever since. Even dear aunt Bab never gave us any particulars. One day, indeed, when warning me not to fall in love with a duelist, she told me my poor father had been killed in a duel. But that was the only allusion to the facts I ever heard till I received these letters. Even Mr. William Thornton, when he used to come to see me often, 'on business,' as he said, never even approached the subject."

"It must have been a painful—a dreadful one to him," I answered. "I do not wonder he abstained."

"Bessy, Bessy!" cried the voice of our good, old, maiden hostess. "Sir Richard, if you have had your chat out, will you come in to breakfast? We have a guest here who knows you."

Bessy and I would both have dispensed I believe, with the breakfast and the

guest; for that morning, as a Persian poet says, in speaking of the conversation of happy lovers, we had certainly "fed on roses," and we desired no company but our own.

However, we were forced to go; and, after Bessy had made me assure her that her eyes did not look very red, we returned to the house.

CHAPTER XV.

THE sheriff was standing with his sister at the door, and his first unceremonious exclamation was—

“Why, Bessy, my young friend, you look as if you had been crying.”

“If I have been crying, they have not been unhappy tears, Mr. Sheriff,” answered Bessy; “and you know happy tears are out of your jurisdiction. You have plenty to do with unhappy ones, I have no doubt.”

“Go along for a saucy girl,” said the sheriff,

laughing; "wash your eyes, and then come to breakfast; for we have a great critic of female beauty here, and you may miss a chance, you know, if you don't look your best."

"I'm not in the market," answered Bessy, running into the house.

"And who is your guest, Mr. Sheriff?" I inquired. "You say he is a friend of mine, which saves my question from impertinence."

"Oh, we have no secrets in Virginia," answered the sheriff. "This is Mr. Wheatley of Norfolk. He says, as we have been cutting each other's throats here, he has just come up to see all his dead friends; for, as I dare say you have found out, Wheatley must have his jest, even on the most serious subject. But here he comes."

While the sheriff had been speaking, his sister had retired to the breakfast-room, and Mr. Wheatley joined us, as brisk, as gay, and as composed as ever.

"Ah, Sir Richard," he said, "how are you?"

You have had some shooting affairs lately on a grander scale than when I last saw you. But I dare say this is nothing to India, where you make a battue of rajpoots for your afternoon's amusement, and shoot a score or two rajahs before breakfast; to say nothing of a sultan or two as a big head of game."

I laughed, saying, that of course such sport as we had lately had, was rather flat after the amusements he mentioned. Then, turning to the sheriff, I remarked—

"What a beautifully organized country this is, Mr. Sheriff, where, on going and demanding the assistance of a public officer, instead of a long bill of costs, we get a good breakfast, a hearty welcome, a towel, and some cold water."

"Oh, the bill will come by-and-bye," said the sheriff.

"By way of desert?" asked Mr. Wheatley. "Well, if it does, we must try to swallow and digest it."

“But, if there be no secret, what is it all about, Mr. Wheatley?” asked the sheriff.

“Oh, no secret at all,” replied my Norfolk friend. “One of those matters of business which occur every day. A gentleman, who owes to me and my Boston partners certain banks of ducats, as that funny old fellow, Shakespeare, would call them, which he neglected to pay, he promised them the day before yesterday morning, on the nail, in the City of Portsmouth, at the hour of the arrival of the stage. But neither he nor the dollars ever appeared. I had warned him that this was the last time—it was about the fiftieth—that he should break his promise, and I pointed out to him that though habits of intimacy and some kindness shown to me, a long time ago, when he was a man of about forty, and I a youth of twenty-two or twenty-three, had induced me to forbear, notwithstanding the after-conduct which had severed our friendship; yet, as there were other persons concerned,

who had befriended him, at my request, I was now bound to see them paid."

"But who is he, who is he?" asked the sheriff.

"Oh, your neighbour, Mr. William Thornton," replied Mr. Wheatley. "He told me he was to receive thirty thousand dollars this week, and would pay them over immediately; but he was like Hope, that told the flattering tale, which turned out untrue."

"He has had his hands somewhat too full of business lately," replied the sheriff, gravely.

"Yes, my dear sir," answered Mr. Wheatley. "I dare say there has been a little bustle in the country; but I cannot allow the sports and pastimes of a number of coloured gentlemen to interfere with regular commercial transactions."

"You are not aware, my good friend," replied the sheriff, "that this unfortunate gentleman was, himself, severely wounded yesterday, and his son shot dead on the spot, by

some of the revolted negroes. These are the latest victims of Nat Turner's insurrection. I trust they will also be the last."

Mr. Wheatley looked aghast.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed. "Of his son I know nothing; but of himself I saw very much in my young days, when this Robert was a boy."

"I trust, under the circumstances, Mr. Wheatley," said the sheriff, "that you will not judge it right to disturb this unfortunate man on his death-bed."

"I must see that the property is some way adequately secured," said Mr. Wheatley, gravely, after a moment's thought. "For myself, I should not care, sheriff. I could make up my mind to lose the fifteen thousand dollars, which is my share of the business; but there is another gentleman concerned, who never knew him, and is greatly irritated at his conduct."

“He has been very unfortunate, you know,” urged the sheriff.

“Nay, sir, nay,” replied Mr. Wheatley, drawing himself up with a sterner look than I ever thought his face could assume. “Unfortunate, truly, in being destitute alike of principle, and honor, and generosity; but in nothing else. The base and scandalous transaction which broke off my intimacy with him, was the beginning of what you call his misfortunes.”

“I do not understand what you allude to,” answered the sheriff. “What did he do?”

“No matter, no matter,” answered Mr. Wheatley. “I cannot enter into particulars; but he grossly and grievously insulted an excellent lady, the wife of his dearest friend, while her husband was absent on a sporting trip. It was within my hearing, though he did not know I was near. That was enough to sicken me of him; but, when I afterwards

found, that he contrived to slay Uriah, the Hittite, with the sword of the Philistines, then Sir —. But here come the ladies to announce breakfast, I do hope; for that is a much pleasanter thing to discuss than what we are discussing.—Miss Davenport, I kiss your shoe strings.”

“Mr. Wheatley, I never wear shoe strings,” answered Bessy.

“Then, may your shadow never be less!” rejoined Mr. Wheatley.

“God grant it!” cried Bessy; “for it is little enough already.” And we all laughed and went in to breakfast.

It is wonderful how the human mind recovers from the most severe shocks. There is an elasticity, a buoyancy, about it which no one knows or believes, till he has remarked closely what I may call the evenings of the terrible days of human life. Some dreadful event has happened—some ghastly, sweeping desolation—something which has shaken all hearts with

anxiety, or chilled them with fear. A few hours have passed : the event is over, the deed done ; the consequences ascertained ; the whole thing is fixed, firm, and certain, beyond all recall ; and though a certain portion of sad remembrance, a mourning spirit, if I may so call it, remains like a cloud, yet every now and then the corruscation of a smile, or a jest, enlivens the gloom ; the tears dry up in the re-awakening sunshine, and, shade by shade, the fragments of the cloud depart.

To call our little breakfast-party gay, would be to apply a wrong epithet. Yet it was not altogether uncheerful—far, more cheerful than might be expected by those who consider nothing but the dreadful scenes gone before. They very naturally leave out of consideration all the bright reaction which takes place in the human heart, when it finds itself suddenly freed from the weight of dread and horror and anxiety for the next moment ; when security and peace are restored, and the spirit

springs up, and rejoices in the removal of evils and terrors which once clouded the prospect all around. In the moral, as in the physical world, nature re-acts against oppression. Look at the thunder-storm, with its heavy clouds and its darkened sky, the flash, the roar, and the deluge; and then see the clouds rolled away, and the blue sky smiling above, and the sun shining in his splendour, and every drop upon the blades of grass, sending back, like diamonds, the cheerful rays he casts upon them.

It is true, that, as we sat round the table, it was not all brightness. Moments of sombre thought would fall upon us; impressions of great calamities past; recollections of things that never were to be more; and the shadows which the experience of danger and sorrow ever projects upon the future. Still, these were but the shadows of the fragments of past clouds, and the sun-light of the relieved mind shone out bright between.

After breakfast, Mr. Wheatley, and the sheriff, and myself walked quietly out into the porch, to re-discuss the subject which had been broken off an hour before. The kindness of the worthy magistrate's heart was strongly evinced in this instance.

"I have no great love for William Thornton," he said; "I never have had; still it is a sad thing to see writs, or executions, or foreclosures, put in force against a man lying in a dangerous, if not a dying, state, from a severe wound. Now, I think you have said, Mr. Wheatley, that you did not mind for your own share in the business, if you could secure your partner."

"Rather a hard case, sheriff," replied Mr. Wheatley, with one of his short laughs. "I have breakfasted since, and have, of course, grown hard-hearted. Nothing like an empty stomach for tenderness towards anything, except broiled fowls or cold lamb. However, I won't go back from what I said. If he can

secure Mr. Griswold, I will take my chance out of the sweepings."

"I have no doubt," said the sheriff, "that Miss Davenport will advance the money to repay your friend."

"No! no!" cried Mr. Wheatley, with a burst of eager feeling which I had not expected from him. "She shall not do it—I will not take it from her. He insulted and outraged her mother; he brought on the death of her father to conceal what he had done; he was, more or less, the murderer of the one and of the other; for grief killed *her*, and the pistol killed *him*; and the daughter shall not be called upon, with my consent, to save him from the consequences of his own folly or his own faults."

"Well, Mr. Wheatley," I said, interposing before the sheriff could reply. "Another means, perhaps, may be found. Suppose I advance the money, and place myself in the

position of your friend, who originally lent it."

"Oh, that is quite a different case," said Mr. Wheatley. "If you choose to do such a thing, I have nothing to say against it. Every man to his taste. Some love helping scoundrels; some prefer to help honest men. The first, was rather a passion of mine, some years ago; but I have got over it, and the latter is more to my taste now."

"Still," I replied, "for particular reasons of my own, I should like Miss Davenport, in the first instance, to offer this loan to her relation—merely, I will confess, to see what will occur in consequence. The advance shall be mine in the end; but I should like to obtain her permission to make the offer from her."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried Mr. Wheatley. "Pray arrange your little embroglios as you like for me. She will consent, of course; knowing on whose pocket the loss will fall at

length, whether *you* advance the money or she does. But go and ask her—go and ask her; and then I think we will ride over, Mr. Sheriff, to Bill Thornton's plantation, and see what is the real state of affairs."

"Very well," replied the sheriff; "but, remember, till you produce all formal processes, I take neither officers nor *posse* with me, and I must be back in a couple of hours."

I did not detain the gentleman long. I found Bessy in the parlour, and her consent was given at once.

"It will not hurt us, Richard, if we lose it," she said. "We shall have enough for happiness, I dare say."

"Oh, quite," I answered. "But now I am going over to see this unfortunate man, and I trust, my dear girl will spend the time till I come back in pondering upon the happiness which her affection confers upon one who loves her with his whole heart. If I know my

Bessy rightly, she feels no greater pleasure than in making others happy."

"I wonder if it is to be so through all my life," said Bessy. "Every one has spoiled me—parents, friends, relations. And now comes a husband to do it more than all! Richard, Richard, I really must find some occasion to quarrel with you, that you may not make me altogether a spoiled child. There, go away now, and tell the poor man I am ready to do anything I can for him. I wonder that Mr. Wheatley can be so unkind as to ask him for payment of debts, when he is in such a condition."

When I rejoined the two gentlemen in the porch, I found that an alteration of plans had taken place. The sheriff had recollected some business he had to transact in another quarter; and it was agreed that I and Mr. Wheatley should ride across the Swamp to the place where Mr William Thornton lay.

“I shall tell Harry Thornton that you won’t be back till two or three,” said the sheriff; “and, as I know he has some business to transact with you, I will try and get him and all his party to come over here, and dine and sleep: four or five girls, and four or five lovers, and four or five elderly people, and talking, and music, and flirting——a fine way of transacting business, truly; but it is the Virginian mode, and so let it pass. I will order the horses, Sir Richard; you go and get on your boots.”

I now proceeded to my room, where I found Zed, after his own breakfast, arranging all my dressing-articles and apparel in the most inconceivable derangement. It would not only have puzzled Œdipus, but the Sphynx herself, to discover where any single article was; and yet he was as proud as a peacock of the whole.

Poor Zed seemed quite thunderstruck, however,

when I told him to get me a pair of boots, and another coat.

“Lor a masey!” he cried; “what, going away again? Why, I haven’t seen you, mas’r, for such a long time; and I thot you were going to tell me all about it. Well, at all events, you had better take me wid you, for you never comes to no good when I isn’t there.”

“I dare say that is all very true, Zed,” I replied; “but I think this morning I must go by myself, or rather with Mr. Wheatley only, for I have a good deal to say to him as we ride along.”

“Lor, mas’r, what does dat sinnify?” asked the persisting negro. “I shan’t int’rupt you.”

But I remained firm; and, in a few minutes, Mr. Wheatley and I were upon the road. I have never been fond of long prefaces to anything; and I was hardly out of sight of the

house, when I dashed at the subject which was uppermost in my thoughts.

“ You accidentally came upon a topic before breakfast,” I said, “ which bears strongly upon some questions which had been puzzling Miss Davenport and myself this morning a good deal. Now, I wish, Mr. Wheatley, that you would give me some farther information in regard to this Mr. William Thornton, and his connection with Colonel Davenport. You were in the high road to do so, when we were summoned to breakfast.”

“ Oh, no ; I had said all I intended to say,” replied Mr. Wheatley, with what I may call an unwilling look ; “ though I should fancy, Sir Richard,” he added, “ *you* had not said all you intended to say this morning before breakfast ; for you and Miss Bessy were so deep in conversation, that you did not even see me when I arrived ; and that conversation seemed to promise wide extension.”

I was not to be led away from my point, however; and I answered—

“We were talking of the very question to which I have just now alluded. Yesterday morning, Bessy and I had a very strange proof of old William Thornton’s personal hatred towards her. He would not even allow her to staunch the bleeding of his wound; and used language not only fierce, but indecorous. We were wondering, when summoned to breakfast, what could be the motive of the persecution he has shown her through life; and it was, in some degree, to test the extent of this virulent antipathy, that I desired she should offer the money rather than myself. I should not be surprised if he were to refuse it at her hands.”

“I think it very likely,” replied Mr. Wheatley; “but tell me how you and she happened to be so near when the the old man was shot?”

“I will tell you all about it,” I answered,

“if you will give me the explanations I wish in return.”

“Well, well,” he replied, “it is a subject I neither like to think of, nor to talk about. Indeed, I may call a considerable portion surmise; for, although I am as much morally convinced of the inferences I draw from the facts, I know, as well as that I am alive, there are many of them for which I have no proof. However, we are now going to see this unhappy old man. There is no knowing that he may not himself tell you all, for his moods are very curious, and the fear of death may act strongly upon him. But if *he* does not do so, *I* will. And now let me hear how you and Miss Davenport have passed through all these terrible scenes. All that I could learn about you, by the way, was that you and the lady had escaped from poor Stringer’s house, and had been wandering alone in the woods ever since—no very unpleasant pilgrimage, I should think—

ha! ha! ha!" And there his laugh stopped short as usual.

"It was, of course, by no means unpleasant," I replied, "when once I could convince myself she was safe, Mr. Wheatley. But our adventures were numerous; and it was not till I and Mr. Henry Thornton brought our sweet young friend to this house last night, that I could be at all satisfied she was secure."

I then went on to relate briefly all that had happened to us, from the time that old Zed ran into my room to warn me of our danger, till our arrival at the sheriff's on the preceding evening.

Mr. Wheatley seemed to take a great deal of interest in the whole matter, and expressed much indignation at Mr. William Thornton's conduct. At that part of my narrative, where I spoke of the father and son wishing to force Bessy to sign some papers, while they held her in a sort of duress, he exclaimed—

“That was to pay the thirty thousand dollars, depend upon it. If we could find the fragments of those papers she tore up, I would bet you a thousand dollars to a ten-cent-piece we should find some gross fraud—the admission of some debt, or some promise to pay, or something of that kind, all wrapped up nicely in legal-like phrases, and guarded, and double guarded, by allusions to former transactions in order to make a piece of roguery seem fair and honest. But I can tell you one thing, Sir Richard—this does not look well for the ultimate payment of my money, and I certainly do not intend to shuffle off a bad debt upon you or Miss Davenport either. If we find there is any tangible property sufficient to guard you against much risk, I shall be very willing that you advance the fifteen thousand dollars to pay off Griswold; for he is becoming impatient and irritable. But it is clear to me these men must have been desperately pushed to have

had recourse to such means ; although, to say truth, from all I hear, Robert Thornton always preferred the rashest and most violent paths of roguery, to the quiet and peaceful ones. ”

CHAPTER XVI.

I HAD concluded that the wounded man still lay at the house on the other side of the Swamp, to which he had first been carried; and had it not been for an accident, we should have had a long ride for no purpose.

Just as we approached what they called the new place, my horse began to go lame; and seeing an old negro standing at the door, I beckoned to him to come and take out the stone which I was sure had got jammed into the beast's hoof. The old man came up at a

slow pace ; and, as he approached, to my surprise, I found it was that very remarkable person, uncle Jack. Between him and me, the stone was soon removed, and I happened to ask him, just as I was re-mounting, what he was doing there.

“I am waiting to see Mr. Thornton again, sir,” he said ; “ Mr. William Thornton. His son, Robert, you know, is dead.”

“ Do you mean to say the old man has been brought over here ?” I exclaimed.

“ Yes, sir ; he would be brought over last night, in spite of all remonstrance ; and I fear he has killed himself thereby,” was uncle Jack’s answer.

I called to Mr. Wheatley, who had ridden on, and beckoned him back ; and while he was returning, I proceeded to ask uncle Jack what he meant by saying that he was waiting to see Mr. Thornton again.

“ Why you see, sir,” answered the old negro-preacher, “ I knew the gentleman whom

you call the old man, when he was quite a little boy ; and much used I to talk to him at that time, so that even when he had grown up to be a lad and did things which I hope God will forgive, I had much influence over him—very much for a poor ignorant negro to have over a well educated white man. He would listen to *me* when he would listen to nobody else ; and, more or less, has done so all his life. So I came here as soon as I heard what had happened. I found him very rash and raving last night ; but this morning he is down, sir—down, down, very low indeed—down in mind, and body, and heart ; but it is by the blessing of God it is so ; for I trust yet to bring his mind into a better frame to meet his Maker ; and you know, sir, we must never despair after the thief on the cross. This morning he listened to me quite willingly ; and seemed to take comfort when I told him of mercy and pardon. Last night, he would not hear at all, but cursed and blasphemed till I was glad to get away.”

The concatenation of a black teacher and a white neophyte, had probably not occurred since the days of the apostles ; still I was very glad to avail myself of any circumstances which would enable me to obtain light in a matter where the whole feelings of my own heart and that of another were so deeply interested. There are some cases in the world where we know no compromise—where, for the sake of our own peace, we must know all, see all distinctly—really—as it is, lest there be, somewhere in the dark outskirts and corners of the den of circumstances, some incubus which may swell, and grow, and oppress the heart, till it crushes us to death.

Such seemed the case with me. I determined to know all, if it could be known—I determined that there should be no dark and cloudy spot, no storm upon the edge of the sky, the course and nature of which I did not know ; and, although the future, the dark predestined future, no man can truly divine—the past, upon which the seal of destiny was set, the true,

irrevocable past, might well be scanned, till the real gold of truth should be separated from the dross of doubt and falsehood.

“We want much,” I said, addressing the old negro, “to see Mr. William Thornton upon business of great importance—business which has even reference to the hour of death, and which must not be postponed. Indeed this gentleman *must* see Mr. Thornton in order to spare him greater discomfort at this sad and perilous moment. I may have more personal views; but at the same time, my good friend, I cannot help thinking that he who parts from this world with a free confession of his errors in it, and some expression of regret, sets forth for the wide future with more comfort and more hope.”

“Assuredly,” replied the negro; “and I will try to bring him to receive you as tranquilly and as willingly as may be. But I cannot answer for success: perhaps he may refuse—perhaps you may have to force your way to him whether he desires it or not, as I had

last night ; but at all events, I will do my best. Wait here, and I will return to you presently. He was somewhat drowsy when I left him ; and I was glad to give him a little repose ; for the words which I had read to him from the Great Teacher, had tortured him like the first effect of a strong medicine for the cure of a terrible disease."

The old man paused ; and, after a moment or two of silent thought, went back into the house, telling some of his dark brethren to take care of our horses. We followed him into one of the lower rooms ; and the contrast was certainly very sad between the aspect of his dwelling and that of his cousin Mr. Henry Thornton. They had set out in life very nearly equal in fortune—perhaps, of the two, William Thornton was the more wealthy ; yet the one had surrounded himself with family ties ; had lived in comfort, if not in splendour ; had done right and justice to all men ; had preserved a high and unspotted name ; and, in

moderation, had continued in peace and competence. Probably his household presented no difference from the state in which it existed twenty years before ; he had sought for nothing higher, he had fallen no lower.

On the contrary, in the house wherein we now stood, we could trace the footsteps of dishonest ambition, disappointment, and decay. It was the latter stage, indeed, which was altogether visible. Misery and dilapidation—neglect, and the consequences of neglect, made their abiding place in this dwelling. Yet, every here and there, were slight indications of the steps by which the consummation had been arrived at—a velvet sofa worn through to the sacking—a rich carpet trodden out to the warp—window frames long unpainted, with the glass rattling in the shrunken wood-work—many a pane cracked and not repaired—chairs broken and unserviceable—tables wanting castors, and leaning, like cripples, on one side—everything, in short, which could display

the careless apathy of minds either occupied by eager schemes for the future, or crushed by the disappointment of the past.

In that melancholy parlour, the black preacher left us, saying—

“I will go up to him again and see what progress I can make. He is in the room just above; and if I stamp with my foot, it is to show that you had better come up to the door, where I will give you some sign when you shall come in. It is better that you should present yourselves quietly, than run the risk of rousing him into one of his fits of fury, when nothing on earth is to be done with him.”

Thus saying, he left us; and Mr. Wheatley and I remained a quarter of an hour or more very nearly in silence. He was more impatient than I was, for I think he is naturally of a more irritable disposition. He would sit for a few minutes, and then rise and walk about the room. Then he would open the window-blinds

and look out ; and then he would sit upon another chair and listen. We could hear, during the greater part of the time, a murmur of low voices ; but it was impossible to distinguish who was speaking. At length, Mr. Wheatley, with his whole patience exhausted, jumped up, exclaiming—

“Come, we had better go up and see what is taking place. We may be kept here all day ; and you have business, and so have I, to attend to.”

Without waiting for reply or assent, he opened the door, went out, and mounted the staircase ; but at the top we heard the murmur of voices from a room on the left ; and putting my hand upon his arm, I stopped him just as he was about to enter.

“Stay a moment,” I said. “It is cruel to intrude upon a dying man. That voice sounds very differently now.”

“Pooh ! that is the old preacher’s voice,”

said Mr. Wheatley, pushing the door partly open. But he paused immediately; for the scene within had a simple solemnity in it which affected even him. There lay old William Thornton, stretched upon a faded bed, with his head turned partly away from us, but with the long, whitish hair, uncombed and rough, scattered on the pillow. Kneeling at the other side of the bed, was the good old man, uncle Jack. A book was open before him, and he was reading aloud that sublime chapter in the Gospel wherein the Saviour teaches his disciples how to pray. His voice was fine, and, notwithstanding his great age, unbroken; and there was a peculiar tone of loving confidence in it as he read the only perfect prayer, that was very touching. He laid particular emphasis on the words—“*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*” But when he stopped, Mr. Thornton remarked, in a very feeble voice—

“ Well, it is very fine ; I always thought so ; yet I don’t half understand it, old man. Let us hear what you make of it.”

“ I doubt, master, that I am competent to make much of it, where you, so much better taught, do not understand it,” answered uncle Jack.

“ I don’t know,” said the dying man. “ You have thought of nothing but such things, and I have thought of them too little, perhaps.”

“ Well, I will try,” said the negro. “ You see, sir, there is no piece of writing that I know of in which every word has so much meaning. It first begins by teaching us what God is.”

“ I don’t see that,” said Mr. Thornton. “ But go on—go on.”

“ It tells us that He is a Father to those who pray unto Him sincerely—one who has the feeling and affection of a parent—not alone the Being who created us, but who still regards

us as His children, however wayward and sinful—who is as ready to be reconciled to us as a Father to an erring child, and to give us all good things as a Father gives good gifts unto his children. Oh, what a tender idea it gives us of our God when we are taught by His own word to address Him as our Father! But then it shows us His greatness also—His majesty and power. It is not an earthly father whom we address, who may not be able to give us what we seek—who may have no power to protect, no means of comforting or blessing us; but our Father which is in Heaven. That does not mean here or there—in this place or that—but above all, ruling all, upon the throne of His majesty and His power in the centre of, and throughout all His universe, in the Heaven of His own glory and love.

“Well may the prayer go on ‘*Hallowed be thy name!*’ Let His great name always be

sacred ; but, above all, let it be hallowed when it is written, ‘ *Our Father which art in Heaven !*’

“ ‘ *Thy kingdom come !*’ are the next words.”

“ Ay, that I do not understand,” said Mr. Thornton, faintly. “ Why should people pray to die when they want to live ? I could never understand that.”

“ It is no prayer for death, sir,” said the old negro teacher. “ Our Saviour has said— ‘ *The kingdom of God is within you !*’ and it may either be a prayer that the holy and happy kingdom of God be established with all its peace in our own hearts, or that it be established in its purity and unity throughout the whole world. ‘ *Thy will be done !*’ are the succeeding words ; and these teach, first, that resignation to the will of God, which is one of the purest forms of His worship—a humble acknowledgment of His wisdom, and mercy, and love ; and a profession of our full faith, and trust, and confidence in Him ; and secondly, taken with the words that follow,

how we ought to do God's will ourselves, and how we ought to wish all others to do it, 'in earth as it is in Heaven!' not slowly, not grudgingly, not doubtingly; but with joy and alacrity, and full faith and trust—as it is performed spontaneously by the holy angels."

Mr. Thornton moved impatiently in his bed; and the old man, as if afraid that he would interrupt him, proceeded more rapidly.

"The prayer then goes on to say, '*Give us this day our daily bread!*' That means, I think, the complete provision of God's mercy—all that is needful for us during that day, as well for the body as the soul—the bread that sustains the flesh, and the bread of life itself—all, in short, that we want and require—"

"Well, that is sensible," said the wounded man, in a somewhat stronger voice. "It is a very fine prayer; I don't deny it."

"You can't think, sir, what a comfort it would be to you if you could but make up your mind to repeat it."

“I think I can repeat it,” said Mr. Thornton. “I am sure my mother made me say it so often when I was young, that I can’t have forgotten it—though that is a long time ago. Let me see.”

And he began the prayer, murmuring in a low, but still articulate voice. He proceeded very fluently till he came to the words, “*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*” There he paused, and muttered something between his teeth.

“Those are the most important words of all,” said the old negro, earnestly. “Upon those words hang the only hope of being forgiven. Oh, Mr. Thornton, do say them. If ever you have done anything to offend God—if you have ever done anything to injure man—if you have any cause to fear the judgment hereafter, and which of us has not?—if there be one act in your whole life which you could wish to blot out—forgive, if you would be forgiven.”

“Davenport!” ejaculated Mr. Thornton, in a wandering tone, “Davenport! He did not trespass against me; but his wife did. She spat at me—she called me villain, and scoundrel—said she would tell her husband all. I recollect how he looked when he died. She could not have told him, uncle Jack, for there was no time; yet he looked very much as if he thought I had done something. It was a bitter, reproachful sort of look. But I say, uncle, do you think that we are obliged to forgive those who have never trespassed against us as well as those who have? That’s the question.”

The man’s mind was evidently beginning to wander, and Mr. Wheatley entered the room without farther ceremony.

“Ah, doctor,” cried the wounded man, turning round in the bed as soon as he heard a step. But, when his eyes fell upon Mr. Wheatley, a strange and fearful change came upon his countenance. When he first turned it, it was not only as usual, red from long

habits of somewhat excessive drinking, but apparently flushed with fever. When he beheld Mr. Wheatley, however, the colour changed in a moment to a cadaverous white, with here and there a bluish spot; neither did it resume its former hue: the effect was permanent, and he remained looking more like a dead man than a living one.

Wheatley saw the change which had taken place; and, advancing to his bed-side, he spoke kindly to him, and in a cheerful tone.

“Ah, Mr. Thornton,” he said, “I am sorry to see you ill. I came over to inquire after you, and try if we could not settle that little matter between you and me amicably.”

“Who is that man?” said Mr. Thornton, glaring at me, as I stood a little behind my friend. “I have seen him before. It can’t be Richard Conway come out of the Chesapeake—he is very like him.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Wheatley. “He’s been dead near twenty years.”

“Ay,” said Mr. Thornton, gloomily, “he’s rotten enough by this time.”

“Just try to gather your thoughts together,” said Mr. Wheatley; “and see if we can’t arrange this matter about the thirty thousand dollars quietly. I think we can; for as to my share of the matter, I can wait; and as for Griswold’s, I have a proposal to make to you.”

“Uncle Jack,” said Mr. Thornton, in a low voice, “give me a tumbler full of whiskey—make haste, man, I feel faint. There’s the bottle by the bed-side.”

With evident reluctance, the old negro found out the spirit, and the dying man drank it off at a draught. It seemed to revive him a little; but it made no change in his colour.

“A proposal!” he said, in a stronger voice. “What proposal? I can’t pay you the first cent. I have been disappointed in the money I expected; that’s the long and the short of it. As to the estate, you can’t touch that; for that’s settled upon Robert long ago.”

He had forgotten that his son was dead ; but it seemed suddenly to flash upon his recollection, for he paused and put his hand to his head, stammering forth—

“I forgot, I forgot. A proposal ! what proposal ?”

“Why this, and I think it a very kind one,” said Mr. Wheatley. “A young lady—a very good and generous young lady—offers to advance you the sum necessary to pay off your debt to Mr. Griswold. For my part, I shall not trouble you, in the situation in which you now are ; but he, depend upon it, will have no hesitation in taking every thing he can take, if the money is not paid by noon to-morrow. You had, therefore, better accept this lady’s proposal at once.”

“Who is she ?” asked Mr. Thornton. “Give me some more whiskey, Jack. I feel—I don’t know what I feel—who is she, Wheatley ?”

“None other than Miss Davenport,” replied Mr. Wheatley.

A spasm like that of death, came over the sick man's face.

"I won't have it—I won't take it—I won't have to thank Bessy Davenport for a cent," he cried, in a voice preternaturally loud. "Give me the whiskey, you old black villain—give me the whiskey."

"Oh, Master Thornton," said uncle Jack, "forgive, if you would be forgiven! Don't you know, don't you feel, that you are dying? That you are going before that God to whom you were just now trying to say, '*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*' Does not poor Bessy Davenport forgive you? And should you keep up rancour towards her? Oh, take her offer, sir, and follow her example before you die."

"Dying!" said the old man feebly. "Am I dying? I do believe I am. Give me the whiskey, Jack. I can't die yet—I am not ready. Oh God, give me a little time to think!"

The old negro looked across to somebody who had just come in and stood behind me. It was Doctor Christy, who said—

“Give it to him; it can neither do good nor harm; but it may keep him up for half-an-hour or so, if there is business to be done. You see,” he continued, speaking to me in a lower tone, as I turned towards him, “there is the Hippocratical visage. No escaping from that!”

“Am I dying?” asked Mr. Thornton, as soon as he had drunk the whiskey; “am I dying, doctor?”

“Yes, sir, you are,” replied the surgeon, almost sternly.

“How long?” asked the other, in a sad and a subdued tone.

“Long enough to show repentance if you will,” answered Doctor Christy. “Long enough to make your will, if it is not a very long one.”

“The will be d——d,” said the old man

in his usual phraseology, which he could not abandon even at that awful moment. "Everything is in confusion. I have no time for that."

"Oh, sir," said uncle Jack, "let me pray—"

"Hush!" said the dying man. "You told me I was to forgive—but forgiveness is nothing, unless I redress—did Bessy Davenport really make that offer?" he continued, looking at Mr. Wheatley.

"She did," replied the other.

"Here, get me the keys out of my pocket. There, take this one," he continued, as soon as he had got them. "Now open that cupboard door, that mahogany cupboard in the corner. On the shelf you will find a tortoise-shell casket, I think they call it—Have you got it?"

"I havn't opened the door yet," said Mr. Wheatley. "Yes, here it is."

"Bring it here then, and the key that lies

beside it—Heaven! how my head swims. There, take that to Bessy Davenport. Tell her I sent it to her with my dying hands. Tell her I am sorry for all I have done—very sorry—that I have often been sorry, but that I would not let myself think so. There, take it. She will find in it what puts all questions about aunt Bab's property at an end—Now, doctor, tell me upon your soul, am I dying? Can nothing be done to save me? If you could extract the ball?"

"It would be no use," answered the surgeon. "It has got in amongst the bones of the hip-joint, and your face shows me at once that mortification has set in. There was a chance yesterday, if you would but have been quiet, and abstained from drinking: to-day there is none."

"Well then, all of you leave me to die like an old fox in his hole," said Mr. Thornton. "Stay, stay uncle Jack! You turn to, and

see what you can do for my soul. We won't think of the body any more. There! Go, the rest of you. I don't want to hear you talk any more. My time is but short, and I must do what I can with it."

CHAPTER XVII.

“AND so goes out a bad life,” said Mr. Wheatley as we mounted our horses and rode away. “It has been compared to the end of a tallow-candle by somebody, I don’t know who—in fact, I never can recollect who it is that has written anything. I can remember the thought; but I cannot recollect the words, nor trace ‘back to it’s cloud that lightning of the mind.’ Well, it is strange to see how men misuse opportunities. This fellow, this Thornton here, set out in life with the very brightest prospects; friends, fortune, relations of commanding influence, talents, education—everything but conduct.”

“And principle,” I interposed.

“Ay, and principle,” said Mr. Wheatley

musing very deeply. "I have come to that conclusion, myself, Sir Richard. At one time, I doubted it; for often, when I acted honestly—by accident, of course by accident—ha! ha! ha! I was diabolically cheated. I was not successful. Principle did nothing for me; I saw the rogue triumphant, the honest man vanquished. I perceived that in worldly wisdom I had acted like a child, and I said to myself, 'Conduct is fate.' But since has come the question, what is conduct? and I am inclined to believe that, in the end, here, even here, honesty is the best policy, principle is the surest guide, and, like the mariner who steers his bark by the compass and the star, though we may look ahead for the breakers or the reefs, the permanent guides to our course are aloft."

Sublime truth was clad in his homely language, and we were both silent for several minutes.

"I wonder what the deuce is in this box?"

said Mr. Wheatley holding up the little casket he had received. "I should like very much to open it and see; but I think after what we have just been talking about, it wouldn't do. I should feel my fingers shake, and you would turn away your head and blush. Yet we could find many a plausible reason. We might wish to save Miss Davenport some unnecessary shock—we might fear that the old man was playing some trick upon her—there might be a loaded pistol, with cunningly contrived machinery, ready within to shoot the person who opens the box. In short, Sir Richard, was ever act committed, so base and mean, which could not find a pretext to justify it, good and valid in a court of law? Now that old man there is going to judgment, granting himself a poor miserable sinner and giving me this box, and thinking that the confession and the reparation are quite sufficient to close the great account and strike a fair balance in the everlasting day-book."

We rode on till within a quarter of a mile of the sheriff's house, without meeting any one; but there we saw Mr. Henry Thornton and the worthy magistrate himself riding towards us. "I was coming after you Sir Richard," said the former as he rode up. "Mr. Hubbard is at my house waiting for you, and we are sadly afraid, do what we can, the escheat will pass. Robert Thornton has so hedged his father in with one legal technicality and another, that we almost fear good aunt Bab's will, will be declared null and void; for the real and personal estate are so mixed up in her devise to you, that it is hardly possible to separate them; and if the will is declared null, even these poor slaves will fall into the hands of others."

"They shall be free, notwithstanding," I answered.

"Stay, stay, stay, all of you," said Mr. Wheatley. "I have got here upon my saddle-bow, Mr. Thornton, Pandora's box, out of which, I hope all the miseries of human life

have long ago escaped, leaving nothing but pleasant hope sleeping at the bottom."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Thornton, almost impatiently. "I do not understand."

"Simply," I said, "that Mr. William Thornton is dying—probably dead by this time. When he discovered how near he was to his end, some degree of remorse seemed to seize upon him and he gave Mr. Wheatley that little case to deliver to our dear Bessy, with an intimation that it would set all right."

"Then we had better carry it to *our dear Bessy* at once," said Mr. Thornton with a gay smile. "From your sweet terms, Sir Richard, and from Bessy's radiant face when I saw her just now, I conclude you are a successful kidnapper, and I don't know whether to wish you joy or to cut your throat; for when you take Bessy Davenport away from amongst us, you deprive our little district of half its sunshine."

"It is but right and just, my good friend,"

I answered, "that the rest of the world should have some portion of the same rays; and, believe me, even were there not many bonds of kindness, friendship and affection between my heart and many a heart here; the spot where I had met Bessy Davenport would always be dear to me and I should visit it often to revive memories so deeply interesting."

"Pooh, pooh!" ejaculated the bluff sheriff. "When you get her across the Atlantic, you won't bring her back again in a hurry; but we can't help it; and, whatever may happen, foul fall the man who would impede Bessy's happiness for an hour."

By this time we had nearly reached the sheriff's house, and it needed some hallooing, being about the middle of the day, to bring any one to take our horses. When, at length, we entered the house, neither of the ladies were to be seen; but the curiosity of the whole party was raised too high for any forbearance, and the sheriff went whistling and calling along the passages without any

reverence for the mid-day sleep, so often taken by the ladies in Virginia. At length, his sister and Bessy joined us; the box was placed before the latter, and the circumstances in which it had been sent, were explained.

“Will you give me a chair, Richard?” said Bessy, calmly. “I have too frequently found unpleasant things in Mr. Thornton’s communications, to open them without fear and agitation.”

She unclosed the case, when she was seated, with a hand which trembled a good deal. At the top, were a number of jewels and trinkets wrapped up in silver paper, some of them of considerable value; but none of us cared to regard them much, for there were some papers to be seen below. The first of these that Bessy took out, was the only one of any real importance, and it was conceived in the following words.

“Codicil.—Whereas, my will, already declared, signed, sealed, and published, on the

— day of — in the year of grace, 1829, was drawn up by persons in whom I have not full and entire confidence; and, whereas, I have been lately admonished and advised that certain clauses and provisions of that will are contrary to the laws of this State of Virginia, and may void, nullify, and render of no effect, the whole of the said will or certain parts thereof, now this is to declare, and I do hereby declare accordingly, that it is my intention that the said will shall have effect in all those clauses, provisions, bequests, demises, appointments, and all and every other particular whatsoever, which shall be consonant to, lawful and permitted by, the laws, customs, and statutes of this State of Virginia, and in no other case whatsoever; and that should it appear after my decease, that any provision or bequest of my said will, dated as aforesaid, is contrary to the said laws, statutes, or customs, or any of them; then I desire and intend that any benefit, property, right or inheritance which might accrue, be taken or possessed by

the person or persons to whom the same was, by the said will, devised, had the said provisions or bequests been lawful, shall be absolutely vested in, and conveyed, by my executors, named in the said will, to my dear niece, Elizabeth Davenport, to have and to hold, to her, and to her heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, in as pure, free, and perfect right, as if no other bequest or devise whatever, had been made in the said will, to which these presents are a codicil ; and, especially, should it be found by my executors in the said will appointed, that in regard of real estate, no alien can, within the limits of the State of Virginia, hold lands in fee simple, either by demise or of inheritance, and that, consequently, my dear nephew, Richard Conway, commonly called Sir Richard Conway, Baronet, is incapable of holding the real estate bequeathed to him by me in my said will, and that the same is liable to be escheated to the State, or else claimed by certain persons on pretence of kin to whom I do not wish the said real estate to descend,

then I leave and bequeath the said real estate, previously devised to Richard Conway, to my aforesaid niece, Elizabeth Davenport, and revoke, recal, annul, and disallow the bequest, previously made to the said Richard Conway."

The codicil was duly signed and witnessed, and Mr. Henry Thornton waved his hand in the air exclaiming—

"That settles the whole affair. There can no longer be either law-suits or roguery, unless you two young people choose to go to law with each other, which I do not think particularly likely."

"Richard, will you go to law with me?" asked Bessy, smiling.

"Decidedly dearest," I answered, in a low tone. "I shall bring a suit before yourself, for yourself, and even press the court for a speedy decision."

She coloured a little and said—

"Hush! You must be good and patient—unless," she added, with a light laugh, "some-

thing of very great importance requires your presence in England, imperatively.”

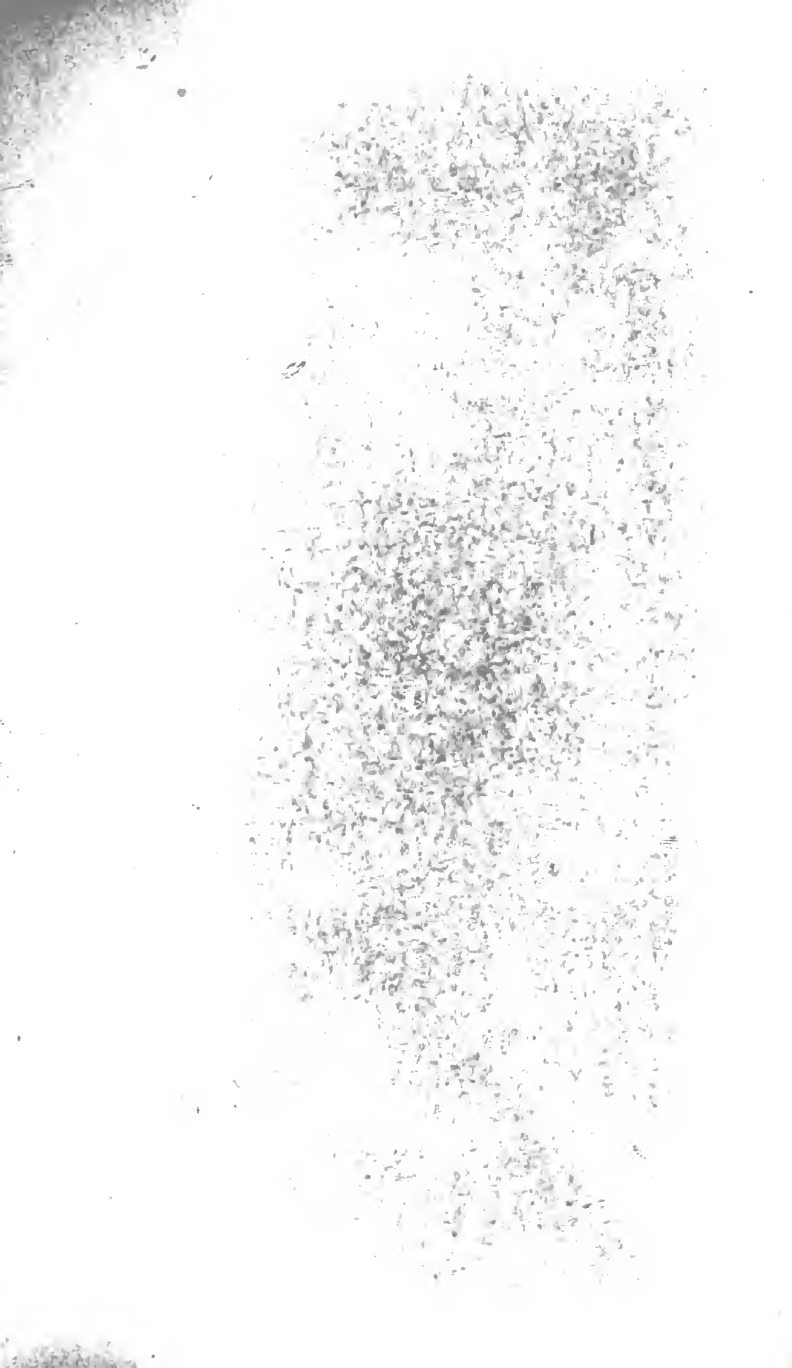
“Business of the greatest importance calls me there,” I answered, following her to the door, towards which she had been retreating; “no less, dear Bessy, than the best happiness life can bestow.”

“Now, I could almost tell you to go and settle that important business and then return to seek me,” answered Bessy. “But I will not coquet with you, dear Richard. You have long been the arbiter of my fate. You are so still, and I will go with you where and when you like. But you must forgive me if all this agitates me a good deal. For any young girl to commit her whole happiness to another, is no slight trial; but, in my case, both the confidence and the trial are still more; for I leave all other friends, the scenes of my youth, my very habits of thought, and my native land, to go with you afar. But I have no doubt, no hesitation, no fear. You are now all to me, and I am now yours altogether.”

A tear crushed between the long dark lashes, fell like diamond sparks upon her cheek ; but I found means to brush it away ; and, before I left her, the day was named.

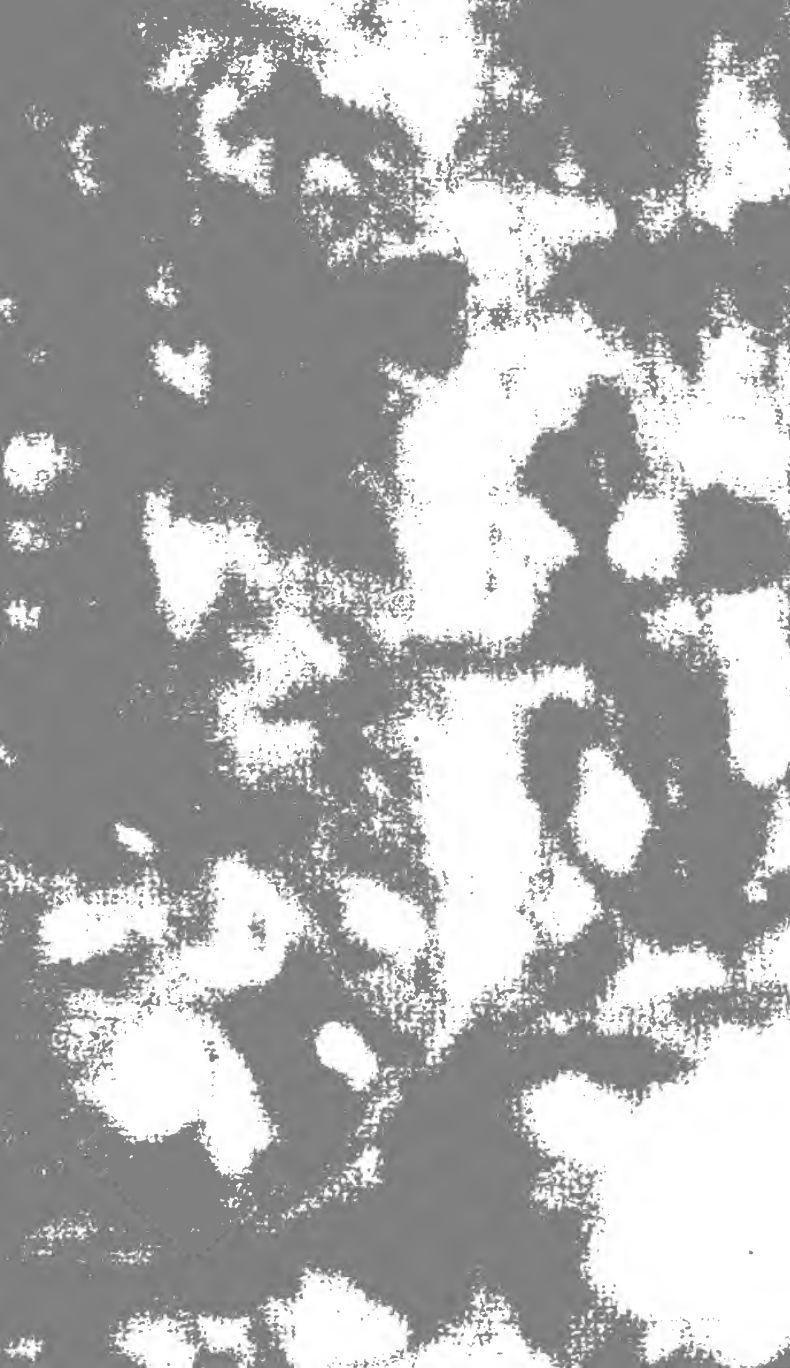
Oh that I could have you too, with me, my dear sister, when that day arrives, were it but to make this dear girl feel that in giving herself to me she only leaves old friends to find others to whom she will be as dear ; and to assure her that in a new land, and a strange home, she will not be received as a stranger. Mary, my quiet spirit, you must not smile at your brother's enthusiasm, wherever it may appear in these pages ; for I intend you to own that if I have been long in choosing, I have chosen well, and chosen one whom you can, from your heart, call sister.

THE END.









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